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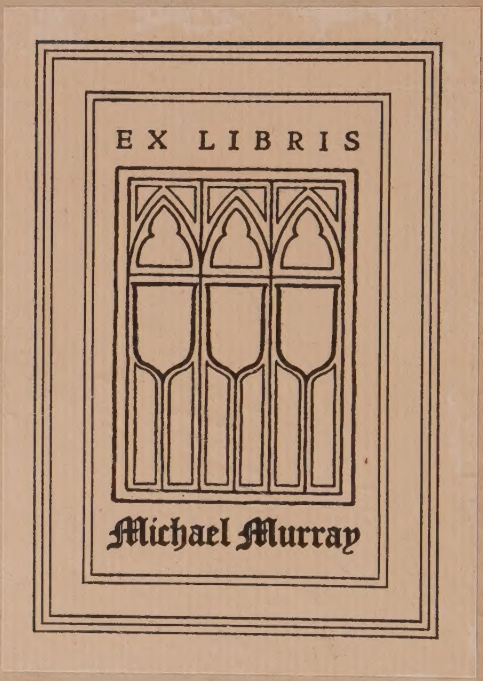

Quarterly Series

SIXTIETH VOLUME

THE MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

ROEHAMPTON
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HE MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

MARY DURING THE FIRST APOSTOLIC AGE

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

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MIHI AUTEM VIVERE CHRISTUS EST
MORI AUTEM LUCRUM
QUOD SI VIVERE IN CARNE
HIC MIHI FRUCTUS OPERIS EST
ET QUID ELIGAM IGNORO
COARCTOR ENIM E DUOBUS
DESIDERIUM HABENS DISSOLVI
ET ESSE CUM CHRISTO
MULTO MAGIS MELIUS
PERMANERE AUTEM IN CARNE
NECESSARIUM PROPTER VOS
ET HOC CONFIDENS SCIO
QUIA MANEBO ET PERMANEBO OMNIBUS VOBIS
AD PROFECTUM VESTRUM
ET GAUDIUM FIDEI

(Philipp. i. 21—25)

PREFACE.

THE present volume carries on the life of our Blessed Lady, after the Resurrection of our Lord, to the point at which it might reasonably be supposed that her work on earth, in and for the infant Church, was more or less accomplished. This point of time corresponds, at least roughly, to the decision of the Council of Jerusalem concerning the liberty of the Gentile converts from the obligations of Judaism, circumcision, and the observance of the Mosaic Law. That decision did not put an end to the efforts of the Judaizing party to impose these obligations on the new converts, but it settled the question once for all as a legitimate controversy in the Church. This decision, when taken in connection with the doctrine laid down by St. Peter, which was in fact identical with the practice and teaching of St. Paul, involved also not obscurely the cessation of the Mosaic obligations, even on other Christians who had not come into the Church from heathenism, and so prepared the way for the final removal of Judaism altogether.

It may well, therefore, be considered as the point at which the first great stage in the history of the Church was reached.

At this date, at least, probably for some time before, the necessity had arisen for the separation of the Holy Apostles, who no longer looked to Jerusalem as the centre and headquarters of the Christian Church. They were now engaged in that arduous work of preaching the Gospel "in all the creation that is under Heaven,"[1] of which such very slight records remain to us on earth, and of which in consequence we have such very inadequate ideas. The Word of God ran through the world from one end to another, and its main preachers were the Apostles themselves and those whom they had personally trained. That glorious history is hidden from us in anything like fulness, until it is to be manifested in the years of eternity.

It may fairly be thought that the earthly work of our Blessed Lady was over when the Church had turned to the Gentiles and when the Apostles were dispersed throughout the world. It may not be quite certain in what year of our era the time came for her to pass to her heavenly throne, and even the place where she fell asleep is not quite certain. I have been obliged to leave this part of the subject of these volumes for the present, as well as that which relates to the blessings which

[1] Coloss. i. 23.

the Church has received from her since she has been in Heaven, and will daily receive until the end of time. To treat of these in the present volume would have enlarged it inordinately. I may beg, therefore, that those who find any pleasure or profit from its perusal, will aid its writer by a little prayer that he may be enabled to complete his design in honour of our Blessed Mother.

H. J. C.

31, Farm Street, Berkeley Square.
Easter Monday, April 11, 1887.

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BOOK I.

MARY FROM THE RESURRECTION TO THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. STEPHEN.

CHAPTER I.

MARY AT THE RESURRECTION.

THE simple words of the Creed, in which we affirm, on the faith of God's Word to us, that our Lord "descended into Hell," cover in their meaning an immense range of truth. Everything in the world beyond the grave is immensely great, in comparison with our most insignificant life and its dwelling. Everything that is done there is simple, and swift, and intense, and penetrating in its effects, to a degree of which we can have no conception. The starry universe itself is but as dust compared to the world of spirits, and all the vigour and beauty and strength which animate material existences, are weakness and emptiness indeed as compared to the forces and the life which are there. Thought itself is not more rapid in its flight than the ordinary movements of that wonderful world. Thus we are able to see that the forty hours, or so, into which the stay of our Lord below was shortened, were not too short for acts of immense might and weight, affecting in their power and intensity vast kingdoms, peopled by innumerable multitudes, in comparison with whom the dwellers on earth are but a handful. In all that relates to the Kingdom of our Lord we must accustom ourselves to bear this in mind—that there

are therein great realms, countless multitudes of His subjects, wonderful institutions and arrangements of power and grace and mercy, of which we have but the faintest hints as yet vouchsafed to us. This consideration may well be placed before our minds at the very outset of our present work, which is devoted to the examination of what may be fairly gathered from Scripture and tradition, the sense and feeling of the Christian mind and heart, concerning the position of our Blessed Lady in this mighty Empire of her Son.

We have considered that the Blessed Mother of our Lord, in the deep retirement and contemplation in which Holy Saturday was spent, must have gone over, step by step, and minute by minute, the wonderful scenes in Jerusalem and on Calvary of which she had been the witness, partly as eye-witness and present at what took place, and much more by the exercise of her pre-eminent gift of spiritual intelligence and of continual and most intimate knowledge of all that concerned our Lord, whether externally or in His Sacred Heart. This contemplation of the Passion was the natural exercise of the heart and mind of Mary during those silent and lonely hours. But this did not hinder her from following, as it was her peculiar privilege to follow, the acts and steps of her Divine Son in His new Kingdom. The realms of which He took possession, as the conquests of His Sacred Humanity by virtue of His Passion, were also, in a true sense, to become the realms in which His Mother was to be Queen, as far as was contemplated in the dispensation of the Incarnation. Wherever He was or went, her heart

followed Him. She was aware when the gates of the world of spirits fell back of themselves to admit Him. She knew when the myriads of good souls, detained in the abode of Limbus, flocked round Him, to offer their homage, their gratitude, their joy at His triumph. She knew what effect His royal Presence produced on the Limbus of children marked by some sign of the Covenant, and on the vast regions of Purgatory. Though our Lord did not enter the abode of the lost in the prison of Hell, His Presence as Lord and Conqueror was there felt by every spirit, human or angelical, of which those dreadful caverns are the everlasting home. Of all this His Mother was conscious.

The presence of our Lord in the world of spirits is said to have lasted till about three in the morning of Easter Day. It will be a wonderful revelation indeed, when we come to know all that He did and said there, the ineffable outpourings of His Sacred Heart, His acts of justice and mercy and compassion, the power and intensity with which He wrought out in a moment the full beatification of His saints, or freely remitted to those in Purgatory the pains which were as yet unpaid. Meanwhile, the Sacred Body, for ever united to His Divinity, but, for this interval, separated from His Soul, remained in the sepulchre with angels around in vast multitudes to adore it and guard it. Other multitudes of angels were occupied, we are told, in reverently adoring, all over the scene of the Passion, from Gethsemani to Calvary, the drops of His Blood, the fragments of His Flesh, whatever portions, however small, belonging to His Body, had been torn from it by the

scourges and other instruments of cruelty and savage insult which His enemies had wielded in the course of that night and morning. If the ground and pavement, the streets and ways and courts and houses of a city, had been strewn with pearls and diamonds, we may be sure that human cupidity would soon sift the very dust, or drain the very mire, rather than that one precious gem should be lost. But here the watchers were the angels, and the treasures to be adored were, as we should say, relics of the Sacred Humanity of the Son of God.

The Body remained during the forty hours as it had been left by the pious hands of Nicodemus, Joseph, and the other disciples. It was fit that it should be visited and adored by the ancient saints, while it yet bore marks of the cruel Passion which it had undergone for their salvation. The loving hands of Mary and the disciples had washed away the earth, the dust, and the other defilements which still clung to it after it was taken down from the Cross. She could but place bundles of spices and myrrh into the still open wounds. She could not obliterate the marks of the thorns, the traces of the numerous falls on the Way to Calvary, and the like. The Body, as it lay in the tomb, was still, therefore, starred with many a mark of what had been. The angels were devoutly adoring the fragments of which we have just spoken, the precious particles were not as yet restored to the Body itself. In such a condition, then, the Body was when our Lord's Soul arrived in triumph at the sepulchre, accompanied by numberless angels, and by the holy ransomed souls of the saints who were now to accompany Him for ever.

They gazed with love, gratitude, and sorrow, on the picture there presented to them of the effects of sin, when its punishment had to be wreaked on the innocent and most lovely Body of the Incarnate Redeemer. In this sense they also "looked on Him Whom they had pierced." But after their devotion had for a short time had its fill, the power of God in a moment had repaired the wounds and restored the Body to its perfection and beauty, leaving only the five great wounds in the Hands, Feet, and Side, which were now clothed with extreme brightness and endowed with a heavenly beauty of their own.

Then, in a moment, the Soul entered the Body and woke it up to life and immortality and glory. The five gifts which had belonged to the Body of the Incarnate Son, by virtue of the Personal union, had been suspended in their operation, by the power of God, during His mortal life, in order that He might be like us and suffer for us. These were now restored to full vigour and efficiency, though they were still in part suspended, at least at times, until the great moment of the Ascension and entrance into Heaven. At the time of the Incarnation this glory had belonged to the Body of our Lord by virtue of the Personal union. Now, by virtue of His sufferings, He had won these gifts for His Sacred Humanity, and for all who were to belong to Him. They were now His especially by virtue of the Passion, and this in proportion to the ineffable merits thereof, and they are to belong to the bodies of those who rise to be with Him in glory, in proportion to the various merits of each of the saints. The glory which the Sacred Body now received was greater than that which had

been manifested in the mystery of the Transfiguration, because it was now permanently assumed, and not only for the moment, as was the case before the Passion was accomplished. The use of the gifts of the glorified state began at once, although, as has been said, that state itself was not ordinarily visible to men. Thus when our Lord left the sepulchre, it was not precisely a miracle that He passed forth without having the stone rolled away, or the seals of the Chief Priests broken, because to pass in such a way was now natural to His Body in its glorified condition. The same may be said of the occurrences afterwards, whether on the Day of the Resurrection or later, in which these gifts were exercised, as in His passing so rapidly from one spot to another for the consolation of His Mother, or of the holy women and Apostles and disciples, or as in His entering the room in which the Apostles were assembled without opening the door.

The saints who had accompanied our Lord from the holy place of Limbus were now allowed to behold Him in His glorified Body, as they had before been permitted to adore that Sacred Body while it still retained some of the traces of the Passion. As the moment of the Resurrection had now arrived, and as the Resurrection of our Lord was not only for Himself, but was the pledge and foundation of a like marvellous renovation of the bodies of the whole race whose nature He had taken on Himself, it is natural to think that at that moment the saints were allowed to understand this, and that they received, in some spiritual manner, the solemn promise that the blessings of the Resur-

rection were to belong henceforth as an inheritance to all the children of Adam, though not all were to be glorified with our Lord. Nor was this a simple promise of a future boon, for we are told by St. Matthew that many bodies of the saints arose after His Resurrection, and went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many. It is reasonable to think that this was done that there might at once be an actual extension of the Resurrection to some of the race for whom its blessings were won, as it is also reasonable to think that at the Ascension of our Lord He took with Him a chosen band of saints to share at once the glories of Heaven.

But we must hasten to the feet of our Blessed Mother, who was, in the manner which has been so often spoken of, conscious of all that passed with regard to her Son, interiorly and externally. She was not, as far as we are told, an eye-witness of the Resurrection itself. But it is thought that at the moment when Life, with all the gifts of glory, returned to the Sacred Body which had been framed in her virginal womb, the Blessed Mother was penetrated and inundated with a sudden glow of joy and delight, which was an assurance, more certain than sight itself, that her Son was risen. She kept this feeling of extreme joy to herself, and set herself to prepare, by acts of praise and gratitude and love, for the sight of our Lord which she knew would be very soon vouchsafed to her. Her joy at the Resurrection was in proportion to her sorrows and sufferings in the Passion, and when we can measure the one we shall also be able to comprehend the other. And it is also understood by the contem-

platives that, as she was now to behold our Lord in the glory of His Sacred Humanity, she was prepared for this by an increase of intelligence as to the nature of that glory itself, and the gifts in which it is manifested.

All human imagination must flag in its attempts to soar to the height to which the joy of our Blessed Lady rose on the entrance of her risen Son in His new Life and glory. No language can paint that moment of ineffable but most tranquil transport. There are joys too great for human weakness to bear, unless it be preternaturally supported, and it must be enough to give, as a measure of the greatness and strength of the soul and heart of Mary, that she could meet our Lord's presence and the embrace in which He folded her to His Sacred Heart with the deep calm and perfect intelligence which were her characteristic gifts. Her whole being was penetrated by His in that embrace. And it is not wonderful if the contemplatives tell us that she was then raised for a time to that intuitive Vision, of which she had before had some experience.

It was very early in the morning, and as yet even the loving Magdalene had not left the chamber in which she was watching for the stars to pale their light. Nor had the other holy women begun to prepare themselves for the loving task which they were hoping to perform in embalming the Sacred Body. There was time for long and loving talk, the communing of the heart and tongue, between our Lord and His Mother. Moreover, He was accompanied now, and perhaps always until the

Ascension, by the band of blessed souls whom He had brought with Him from Limbus. Although they were invisible to the eyes of the disciples, it is reasonable to think that the Blessed Mother was enabled to see them. Our Lord presented them to her as the first-fruits of His victory over death and Hell, the first children of that glorious Kingdom of which He was the founder and the Lord. As her intelligence of Scripture and of the ways of God, especially of all that belonged to the formation of that kingdom, was so great and perfect, she could understand, in each one of these glorified souls, how wonderful had been His goodness, His patience, His power, His mercy, and how in each of them the grace which flowed from our Lord had worked and fructified. She saw before her the long line of the saints and heroes, the prophets and kings, those in particular who had foretold Him and herself by type or history or prophecy. She saw her own dearest parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, and the blessed John also, and her own most beloved Spouse. One of the intensest joys of Heaven is the meeting with the saints and those whom we have loved, in their state of glory, and the fruition for ever of their company and love. There was something of this at this moment of our Blessed Lady's life. For the entrancing delight of the possession of our Lord Himself did not make her incapable of entering into that joy of His which consists in the graces and glories of His saints, and the possession of them by His Sacred Heart.

These ancient saints, with all their glorified intelligence, could not but be rapt in joy at the sight

of her, through whom they and the whole world received their Incarnate Saviour, the source and crown of all their bliss. From henceforth she became their Queen, and they reverenced her and loved her as such, and poured out their hearts in thanksgiving for the large part which it had been given her to bear in the carrying out of the great counsel of God. They were not her equals in sanctity or personal dignity, but they were above her as to their present condition. They had now passed into the possession of God, whereas Mary was as yet on the path of her mortal pilgrimage. Thus there was in them something for her to venerate, and she began in her own person that homage and worship of the glorified saints in which the children of the Church Militant have been exercised ever since, to the great glory of God, the great honour of our Lord, the great delight of the saints, the great profit of their own souls, and the constant increase of that mutual charity and exchange of loving services, which binds together the two great realms of the Kingdom of God.

Thus then, we may suppose, the first early hours of the morning of Easter Day passed away, until the dawn began very faintly to gleam in the eastern sky, foreshowing the approach of that glorious sunrise which was to wake the world up to the first day of the new creation. We do not here go into all the details of the meeting of the holy women, who had probably spent the night in separate parts of the city. This fact accounts for the manner in which their approaches and visits to the sepulchre are spoken of by the Evangelists, who naturally

class them together in their very brief narratives. Magdalene, we may be sure, was the first, while "it was yet dark." [1] Thus her first visit may have been paid before the others joined her. Our Lord was now to begin that most gentle and tender revelation of Himself as Risen to hearts which were indeed glowing with His love, but yet far too weak to bear, as Mary had borne, the full brightness of His Presence and the full disclosure of the ineffable blessings which that Presence bore with it. The history of Easter Day, as we have it in the Gospels, is the story of this most delicate and gradual revelation to the saints of that joyous truth of which Mary was already in possession.

Nowhere do the narratives of the four Evangelists require more careful and reverent study than in this part of their work. The narrative is much longer in St. Luke and St. John than in St. Matthew and St. Mark. The earliest written accounts seem to have been intended to furnish the simplest and shortest story of the manner in which the fact of the Resurrection of our Lord came to the knowledge of the appointed witnesses, that is, of the Apostles. The persons from whom the Apostles first received the joyful tidings were the holy women, Mary Magdalene and her companions. Thus it is that they are the persons spoken of in these narratives. This also is one of the reasons which may be given for the silence of the Evangelists as to the first visit which our Lord paid after His Rising, His visit to His Blessed Mother. The later Evangelists proceeded on the same lines with their earlier

[1] St. John xx. 1.

brethren, though they add in a considerable number of details, and expand others which had been mentioned before them in but a very few words. The careful student of these four precious documents is able to trace the succession of the various revelations of Easter Day, and is abundantly rewarded by the beautiful tenderness and wisdom which he finds in the gradual unfolding of the glorious truth. It is not a part of the purpose of this work to attempt to draw out in full the marvellous condescension and prudence of these successive manifestations.

Our Blessed Lady, as was her wont, would say nothing to any one of the transports of those early hours. They were a secret for her, like that of the Incarnation itself. But with regard to the Resurrection, there was no Divine guidance needed, like that in obedience to which she had gone on her journey for the Visitation, in order that, in God's Providence, the blessed Baptist might be sanctified by the Presence of the Incarnate God, and the dignity of the most blessed of mothers be manifested by the voice of St. Elisabeth. Before the sun set on that blessed Easter Day, the whole body of the disciples in Jerusalem knew the truth. Our Lady's part was to receive, one after another, the announcements as made by the witnesses of the various stages of the revelation. She knew all that they could tell her, but it was not her wont to speak of all that she knew. Magdalene might tell her, in her hurried visit to the place where the Apostles were, that the sepulchre was empty, and then she might hasten back to the spot where she had last seen our Lord's

Body, soon to be gladdened by the sight and words of Himself. She would thus be the first messenger, as it were, from our Lord. She was sent directly, not to the Mother who knew it and had seen Him already, but to His brethren. But she would not fail in her simplicity to bear the tidings to Mary also, and after her the other holy women would come to tell her, in the same way, that they had seen Him.

St. John had been with St. Peter to the sepulchre already, and had seen the clothes laid up with decent reverence, and, as he records of himself that he "believed," we must understand that he speaks of a full and clear faith in the truth of the Resurrection. It is not likely that he would not communicate this too to her to whom he had been so specially commended by our Lord when He hung upon the Cross. After the apparition to the Maries, it is likely that we must place that to St. Peter, of which the disciples spoke in the evening as if it were the crowning proof of the Resurrection, "The Lord hath risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," and which St. Paul, in the famous chapter to the Corinthians, places first of all of the apparitions to the witnesses. He does not mention the women, who were not such. "He was seen of Cephas, after that by the eleven."[2] This may have happened after the departure of the two disciples, Cleophas and his companion, on their walk to Emmaus. The time of this is uncertain, as it appears that they had not heard of our Lord's being seen by the holy women, which yet must have been in the early morning. These two disciples themselves were the next of whom we

[2] St. Luke xxiv.; 1 Cor. xv. 5.

are told as having been favoured by His loving Presence, and it was after their return to Jerusalem that our Lord appeared to the Apostles who were gathered together in the Cenacle, St. Thomas, however, being absent.

Our Blessed Lady had been accustomed, during all the Public Life of our Lord, to follow in heart, when she was not actually present with Him, all His wonderful works and words, to contemplate them with the most loving intelligence, and to praise God and give Him thanks for each. It is but natural to consider that this intimate knowledge and affectionate contemplation now still continued as to all that He said and did, even when absent from her side. The saints have been in some measure able to understand the extreme beauty of His dealings on this Easter Day with the souls who loved Him so much, though it must be supposed that the intelligence with which our Lady followed Him throughout was deeper and fuller than that of all angels and saints.

There is a certain order which seems to be observed in these manifestations to the women and the Apostles. For there is a most gentle and considerate preparation of soul after soul for the entrancing news. The words of the angels, who could not be doubted or questioned, were to Magdalene and the other women the preparation for the sight of our Lord. Magdalene had suffered more than all the women, after the Blessed Mother herself, during her faithful presence at the Passion, and at the entombment. During the interval before the Resurrection she had again manifested in a peculiar degree her devo-

tion and love. Moreover, she had a kind of right of her own in all that related to the sepulture of our Lord, on account of her anointing of His head and feet, which had taken place a week before during the supper at Bethany. She was therefore the next to our Blessed Lady to receive the favour of the sight of her Master, while she was guided by the unerring instincts of her heart to linger at the tomb when the others had departed, and thus to be ready to see our Lord alone, at least with no one present but the angels. The holy women come next, for their love and faithfulness were next to hers. All of these blessed servants of our Lord deserved a special reward for their eagerness and zeal in ministering to Him in His burial, and they are also the pattern and the patrons of thousands of souls dear to God in the Church, whose lot it is to design and labour for good and holy works in His service, in the actual accomplishment of which they are to be disappointed. The will of God is not that those particular services should then be rendered to Him, while at the same time He takes care to console and reward them abundantly and beyond all imagination, as those blessed women who went to embalm our Lord in the sleep of death were rewarded by seeing Him in all the freshness and radiance of the Risen Life.

As the women were gently prepared by the angels, so were the Apostles prepared by the women. It shows the perfect union and mutual devotion of the whole body of our Lord's disciples, that the women ran off so naturally to the Apostles, even when, as in the case of Magdalene, they had not as

yet had any vision of angels telling them to do so. For Magdalene ran to St. Peter and St. John before she had seen more than that the sepulchre was empty. It was on her information that the two Apostles visited the sepulchre, on which St. John, as he says, "believed," though as yet he had seen nothing. But to none of the Apostles were the angels sent. Their appointed informants, as has been said, were the holy women, perhaps because our Lord saw in them a depth and strength of faith, dormant for the moment, which would be enough to enable them to earn the crown of believing on human testimony instead of on that of the angels. The mode of our Lord's manifestation of Himself to St. Peter is nowhere related to us. It must have been a meeting full of the tenderest and most compassionate love—the penitent Apostle kneeling at his Master's feet to receive the assurance that he was perfectly forgiven, and had not by his weakness lost either his faith or his lofty position in the Kingdom of God.

It is remarkable, in the messages of the angels, that St. Peter is specially named, as if our Lord had meant to prepare him in particular for the favour which was to be vouchsafed to him, first of all his brethren. It is also remarkable that the angels were not told to lead either the women, or the Apostles through them, to expect that immediate manifestation of our Lord which was actually to be made to them. They were to go into Galilee, and there they were to see him. This, too, seems to have been a delicate contrivance of love, breaking to them very gradually indeed the truth, and giving them an

opportunity of the exercise of faith in the fact of our Lord's Resurrection. They were to believe first and see afterwards. And when their faith had once been exercised, our Lord could not keep back, as it were, the immense yearnings of His Sacred Heart. Before they had time to carry their message, and many days indeed before they could reach Galilee, there, close to the spot of the Resurrection itself, He made Himself known to them.

Another instance of the same tenderness and gentle consideration in our Lord, seems to be found in the manner in which He appeared. Of course the great example of this reserve is that all through, as far as we are told, up to the time of the Ascension itself, He never showed Himself to them in the glory which belonged to His Sacred Humanity. But besides this, our Lord took great care to hide even His identity, on His first appearances to His friends. Thus Magdalene took him for the gardener, and the two disciples on their walk to Emmaus thought He was an ordinary wayfarer, unknown to them. For He wished not to startle them suddenly, but to lead them, as they were able to bear it, to the full recognition of Himself. So it was afterwards, by the lake of Galilee, on the occasion of His last recorded miracle, after the night spent in fishing by the seven Apostles. He called to them from the shore, but they did not recognize His voice, until, after the miraculous draught of fishes, the loving instincts of St. John told him that it was the Lord.

We may well think that all these devices of the tenderest love were not lost upon our Blessed Lady. Probably during Easter Day itself, and afterwards

during the Forty Days, He was usually with her when His charity did not call Him elsewhere. This is probably the reason why we are told so few things of His movements. The Evangelists do not attempt to trace them in detail, and are also silent about His communings with His Blessed Mother, whose name is not mentioned till we come to the Day of Pentecost. It is most natural to think that this double silence reveals the simple fact that, when our Lord is not mentioned as elsewhere, He was with His Mother, and that our Blessed Lady is not mentioned because her life at this time was almost inseparable from His. In any case, as has been said, hers was the one created heart that could understand Him best, and best give Him thanks and praise for all His condescension and mercy, and we may suppose that she continued now as before her peculiar office of praise and intercession.

During the later period of our Lord's teaching He had spoken and acted with even extraordinary tenderness in the character of the Good Shepherd, searching after the lost sheep in the desert, and laying down His Life for the sake of His flock. It must certainly have been the office of His Blessed Mother, beyond all others, to follow out in her heart all this part of His conduct, and of this manifestation of Himself. He had just accomplished the redemption of the world on the Cross. He had indeed laid down His Life for the sheep and had taken it again, after having, in the regions of the spiritual world, delivered many millions of the sheep from the prison-house in which they were detained. His first hours upon earth after His Resurrection had

been spent with her. But he had left her in order to pass a great portion of this first day of the new Kingdom in gathering His scattered and frightened sheep, one by one, calling them to Him in the gentlest way, as a shepherd would deal with a sheep that had been lamed or injured, or entangled among the thorn bushes, setting it free or leading it home with the most careful tenderness. All this was known in its fulness only to Himself and to His Mother, and the delight and gratitude of her heart for this new revelation concerning Him were continually shedding themselves forth in acts of love, admiration, and thanksgiving.

It is not necessary in the present work to follow one by one all the apparitions of our Lord in the course of the forty days after the Resurrection. A part of the time was spent in Galilee, as the angels had said, repeating our Lord's promise. We have but slender details as to these wonderful days. We are told generally by St. Luke, in the opening verses of the Acts, that He was appearing to them, and speaking of the Kingdom of God.[3] It has always been supposed that these short words refer to the many infallible proofs of the Resurrection which were afforded by the apparitions, and by their "eating and drinking with Him after He rose from the dead," which was a certain proof of the reality of His Human Body. They refer also to the detailed explanations which He then gave them as to the system, organization, principles, methods, and character of the Church of which they were to be, after Him, the founders. This must have

3 Acts i. 3.

involved many long and private conversations, of which we have no further record, though we can gather what their substance was from the organization of the Society which sprang up under their rule immediately after the Ascension and the descent of the Holy Ghost. It was a part of the office of the Holy Ghost to bring out in the minds of the Apostles these principles, outlines, and pregnant instructions now given by our Lord. Here was another great range of subjects on which the illuminated mind of the Blessed Mother could feed itself in contemplation, as we cannot doubt either that the whole had been already communicated to her, or was communicated at this time.

It is quite in harmony with this supposition that, among the few sayings and doings of the forty days of which we have the actual record, there should be so many which have reference to the pastoral office and mission, and to the sacramental system. On the very evening of the day on which He rose from the dead, our Lord spoke the solemn words which contain the actual gift, as distinguished from the promise, of the power of remitting sins. "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed upon them, and He said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."[4] After the account of the temporary incredulity and enlightenment of St. Thomas, the Sacred Text goes on to tell us of the last miracle of our Lord on the shore of the Lake of Gennesareth, which is the immediate

4 St. John xx. 21—23.

introduction to the account of the delivery to St. Peter of the fulness of pastoral authority, which also had been promised to him before, in the loving words, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."[5] It was during this time also that their understandings were opened, that they might understand the Scriptures, and that they received their commission to "go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[6]

These are points which stand out from the general silence in which the details of this period are covered over. They are like mountain summits which stand out like islands in a sea under which a continent is submerged. And as in that case we may gather a great deal concerning the formation and character of what we do not see from the points which are not hidden from us, so we may suppose that the remainder of the conversations of our Lord with His Apostles, had for their subject, as St. Luke's words seem to state positively, that most beautiful work of the Sacred Heart, the construction of the Church. And, as the heart of His Blessed Mother was nearest and dearest to His own, and her intelligence of the ways of God and of the desires and designs of her Son incomparably greater than that of all the Apostles, we cannot doubt that she was perfectly informed as to this great creation of His love, that she shared all His counsels, entering more deeply than any other into their wisdom, their tenderness, their charity.

It is natural also to go still a step further in our reasonings on this matter. Although our Blessed

5 St. John xxi. 15—17. 6 St. Matt. xxviii. 19.

Lady had no part in the pastoral office or hierarchical authority of the Apostles, still it would not be right to forget that she had a great place and office in the constitution of the Kingdom of God. For the power and greatness and work of Mary, in the Kingdom of her Son, are very mighty and magnificent indeed, and there is no power or work in that Kingdom which is simply accidental, and without its due relation and connection with others. We find some of the contemplatives telling us that Mary was at this time solemnly installed, so to say, by the Three Divine Persons, as Queen and Mother of the Church. What the contemplatives tell us in their own manner and language is, at the least, a representation of the most important truth, which the Christian understanding instinctively discerns, concerning the greatness and office of Mary. But, if the Christian understanding of the faithful in general cannot well miss this, it can hardly have been hidden from the chiefs and fathers of the faithful, the Apostles themselves. In the present day, the children of the Church do not require any formal catechetical teaching to tell them of her greatness, her power, and her charity. Thus it has often been said that the doctrinal truths concerning her, at least in their practical consequences, have been unfolded to the world rather by the interior teachings of the spirit of love than by special definitions of Councils or Pontiffs. What it is necessary that we should not forget is this, that after the Passion and Resurrection the Blessed Mother must have filled a larger space than ever in the minds and hearts of the disciples, who had been driven by

their own weakness and fearfulness to take refuge with her during the forty hours of our Lord's absence. The Church entered on her solitary pilgrimage through the world, after the Ascension, when our Lord's visible Presence was again and finally withdrawn, with the full intelligence of all that she was to find in, and owe to, the sanctity, the example, the power, the wisdom, and the charity of the Mother of God.

The first faithful found Mary left to them with a special motherly commission, which answered to her great sanctity and power with God, and to the place which she had occupied in the carrying out of the Divine Counsel of the Incarnation from the very beginning. It was involved in the few short words which He had spoken to her on the Cross, the last words addressed to any human being which had fallen from His lips before He died. Her presence amongst them must have been an element in their condition which could never be forgotten, of an importance not to be exaggerated, of a fruitfulness and power ever fresh. There was nothing in all the features of that condition which could be more pregnant and momentous in their minds, except the Presence of the Holy Ghost and of the Adorable Sacrament. They had been driven, as it were, to her motherly bosom when the storm of the Passion had deprived them of our Lord, and had seemed to scatter in hopeless confusion their chief leaders, the holy company of the Apostles themselves. Each succeeding storm which swept over the infancy of the Church, had the same effect of bringing out in exercise the ineffably tender relations between the

children and the Mother. This should be considered as a natural and perpetual element in the history, an element too natural and perpetual to require an especial record in the short annals drawn up for us by St. Luke.

What thus became so prominent and essential in the minds and hearts of the Apostles and their first followers or companions, must find a corresponding prominence in our own considerations when we frame to ourselves a picture of those first and most blessed days of the life of the Church. As we should be unfaithful in delineating to ourselves those early days, if we left out of consideration so many things of which there are but guarded hints in the narrative —such as the constant exercise of the priestly function on the part of the Apostles and others, the daily Sacrifice, the frequent Communions, the prayers and confessions and penitential exercises of the whole body of Christians—so also should we be unfaithful if we were not to bear in mind this silent but most powerful presence in the Church of the Mother of God. It was a presence loving to hide itself, and yet ever ready to show itself mighty in acts of love and mercy, a presence which seemed to live mainly in heavenly prayer and contemplation, while its very familiarity with God and our Lord made the interests of the Church its daily care, kindling ever more and more the burning charity of that Blessed Mother, sharpening her foresight of coming dangers, enlarging her compassion, and adding force to the intercession with which she was ever ready to fly to the aid even of the least of the children of the Church. She may have been seen but seldom in public, her

life may have been passed in the Cenacle or in frequent visits to those holy spots which traditions, which may come directly from her, have consecrated as the Stations of the Way of the Captivity or of the Cross, and the other holy places in and about Jerusalem. It may have been unknown to the human enemies of the infant community. She was not the less the secret power which bore up, in its measure and kind, the life of the whole, and before which the spiritual foes of the Church shrank in dismay. Day after day brought out the exercise of this power, as it has been ever since in the Church, the power of the Queen of Apostles and Evangelists, the support and light of Confessors, Doctors, and Virgins, the Health of the Sick, the Refuge of Sinners, the Succour and the Help of Christians.

CHAPTER II.

MARY AT THE ASCENSION.

The great mystery of the Ascension fills a large space of its own in the Divine economy of the Incarnation, and in the founding of the Kingdom of our Lord. It belongs primarily to that part of Christian theology and contemplation which dwells on the history of His Sacred Person. But it comes naturally into the history of our Blessed Lady also, so closely united to Him, and sharing in a way of her own in His Life and His work. She had, as we have seen, that participation in His Ministry which belonged to her as His Mother. She stood by the Cross as He hung thereon and as He died, not only as Magdalene and the other holy women, but as there discharging an office, and receiving a commission which was to last on for ever. Her closeness to Him in His Resurrection and the Forty Days is revealed rather than concealed, to the eye of Christian piety, by the deep silence in which it is shrouded, as by far the greater part of the sayings and doings of our Lord are shrouded during the same space of time. It would be absurd to think that our Lord never spoke to His Mother after that Word on the Cross which was addressed to her, because there is no mention in the Gospels of

His having so spoken. What the devout Christian must ask himself is, what the right use of a pious intelligence of the general principles of our Lord's conduct towards His Mother may reasonably reveal to him with regard to her part in the Ascension, as well as with regard to all other parts of the history.

It must be certain, in the first place, that as Mary felt, understood, and derived more fruit from, the Passion than all others, so also she must have a larger share in the understanding of the Resurrection, with all its results and fruits, than all others, and that it must have been the same with regard to her share of the revelations of the Forty Days. And this leads us directly to the same conclusion as to her part in the Ascension of our Lord. If others felt keenly the pang of losing again the visible presence of their Master, so soon after He had returned triumphant from the grave to console them for all the bitter sufferings at His Passion, she must have felt the pang far more, inasmuch as her love was far greater than theirs, and her compassion for Him greater than theirs. If others were flooded with delight and joy at the glories of the Resurrection, she could feel that delight and enter into His joy more fully than they. If others could forget, in their exultation at His triumph, their own tender sense of the sensible loss it was to bring to them when He ascended into Heaven, Mary again could do this more than all. She could understand better than all the meaning of His words that it was expedient for them that He should go away, that if they loved Him they would rejoice that He was to go to His Father. She could understand best of all

the great truths connected with the fruits of the Ascension, the opening the gates of Heaven, the sending of the Paraclete, the sitting of our Lord at the right hand of the Father.

This must be considered as certain. And so it is impossible to imagine that our Lord could favour her with so many rich gifts of grace and knowledge in connection with the long range of the mysteries through which He had already passed, and then stop short at the point of the Ascension, and leave her, as He had once left her, for a short space, when He was twelve years old, without full discernment of and participation in what He was doing. True Christian reason leads us to the certain conclusion, that, as the mysteries of our Lord increased and magnified themselves in the riches of grace and glory which they contained, so also, as they unfolded themselves, one after another, to the illuminated mind of His Mother, the fruits and blessings which she derived from them were ever multiplying and increasing in magnificence, as also her capacity for penetrating them, and her immense advance in love, corresponding to the growth of her knowledge.

Short and partial as are the accounts given us in the Gospels of the Resurrection, they are still more silent or concise as to the Ascension of our Lord. St. Matthew says nothing about it at all. St. Mark merely mentions the fact that our Lord was taken up into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God. St. John is as silent as St. Matthew. St. Luke, who is the only Evangelist who at all describes it, gives to it three verses at the end of his Gospel and a little more at the beginning of the Acts. Each of

the three historical Evangelists, on the other hand, give a full account of the mystery which is most like it in some respects, that of the Transfiguration. It is clear that to the readers for whom St. Matthew wrote, the Ascension was as familiar a truth as the daily rising of the sun. St. John also takes it for granted. St. Mark just mentions it, as was natural in an Evangelist who wrote for a community in which there were many recent converts from paganism, and St. Luke does his duty as an historian in his own gentle and modest way, not saying a word more than was needed. We thus get a slight sketch of the chief features of the scene. In each case the Apostles alone are specially named as present at the Ascension, or rather, they are the persons of whom St. Luke is speaking when he glides into the description of the Ascension. But his language in the Acts may be taken to imply that others, especially our Blessed Lady, were witnesses of the mystery, and it certainly does not contradict such a supposition. We need not here dwell further on the details of the account in St. Luke.

It must be remembered that the Ascension, with all the glories and promises which it involved, was present to the minds of the faithful mainly in its issue and consequence, that is, in the perpetual Session of our Lord in His Human Nature at the right hand of the Father. Just as only one of the Evangelists describes the Nativity of our Lord, so one only, and the same, gives an account of the Ascension. What the Life of our Lord on earth, of which the Gospels are full, was to the Church in memory, such His Glorious Life and Session in

power was to the Church of the Apostles as a present, actual, ever-living truth, the fruits of which were present to her daily and hourly. The later Life was the active principle of the life of the Church, as the Life of our Lord on earth was its historical and theological foundation. Our Lord had said of the office of the Holy Ghost, that He should convince the world of justice, "because I go to the Father, and you shall see Me no more."[1] The whole of the grand revelation of sanctity in the Church was based on our Lord's presence at the right hand of the Father, realized by faith, and, as to this effect, the fruits of His Sacramental Presence, which is that of His glorious and ascended Body, fell under the same promise. Thus there is another mighty and ever-efficacious truth which was, as we may say, too present and familiar to the minds of those who wrote and received the earliest books of the New Testament to be specially mentioned in the history, except in the incidental and inferential manner which has been pointed out. The whole lives of these early faithful were built upon the fact of the Ascension, and for that very reason we are told so little about its circumstances. We have to draw out, as will be seen, some of the most momentous of these from what seem to be passing sayings to be found, here and there, in the Sacred Text.

Christian tradition, as well as reason enlightened by faith, tells us what is indeed more or less implied by the language of St. Paul, that our Lord did not rise to Heaven alone. That He should have been met and escorted to His throne by thousands on

[1] St. John xvi. 20.

thousands of angels may be taken for granted. But it is equally fair to believe that He was accompanied in His triumphant flight by thousands of redeemed souls. This is what is at least implied in the words of St. Paul,[2] which are founded on the language of the Psalms, which declare that when He ascended on high He led captive captivity. The words mean that He had torn away from Hell and death the captives who were awaiting His arrival in the world below, and whom it was His first work then to deliver, the thousands of just souls awaiting their reward, but unable to enter Heaven until He had opened its gates to the children of men. They were captives before, because they were in a state and a place of detention, and He led them captive to Himself and with Himself, when He took them with Him as the spoils of His victory to Heaven. His Ascension was the taking possession of Heaven for the whole race of His redeemed, and it might have seemed a barren triumph if He had entered Heaven alone, and opened the gates to all who believe, without making multitudes who had believed enter them at once.

Christian tradition, moreover, tells us more than this. For, founding itself on the words of St. Matthew about the bodies of the saints who were asleep, and which arose, and entered into the Holy City,[3] and appeared to many after the Resurrection, it tells us that our Lord entered Heaven with His saints, not all with their souls only, but some also in their bodies. This again is but natural, when we consider

2 Ephes. iv. 4; Psalm lxix. 14.
3 St. Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

the same principle of truth which has just been mentioned, namely, that our Lord took possession of Heaven for all the redeemed. It seems reasonable to think, that as His triumph required for its completeness the presence of some of His saints, so also that completeness might not have been fully complete, unless some souls of the departed saints entered Heaven as He did, clothed with their bodies, and raised to the state of glory. And when once this is made clear to the devout contemplation of the Church's children, it becomes at once hardly possible to think of this magnificent effect of the Resurrection as limited or meagre in its extent. Everything about our Lord's triumph is grand and large and royal, and it is easier to think of such a boon as having been granted profusely than as having been imparted with reserve. Putting together the knowledge which we thus get from Scripture and tradition, we become aware of the truth, that the mystery of the Ascension has two distinct parts, that which took place on earth, and that which took place in Heaven. We see also that Sacred Scripture, in its historical narrative, confines itself strictly to the earthly part of the mystery, which may surely be called its less magnificent side. St. Luke only tells us that our Lord was carried up into Heaven, and St. Mark mentions that He sitteth on the right hand of God. But into the details of that most glorious triumph the Evangelists do not enter, any more than they enter on any description of the triumph of our Lord's Soul in the realms below, which began at the moment of His Death.

This picture of the heavenly triumph of our Lord

belongs to our theology, as the account of His taking possession of His Kingdom which has had and shall have no end. The taking possession of a Kingdom is a magnificent solemnity which happens once, while the continuance of that possession, and the exercise of the royal power which is then assumed, last as long as the life of the Eternal King. But it is but reasonable to suppose that the ceremony, if we may so speak, of the "possession," was great and glorious and august in a degree becoming the dignity of the King, and that no feature that belonged naturally to the rights and majesty of His Person and to the circumstances under which the Kingdom had been gained could have been absent therefrom. The description of the Ascension in the Psalms bears out this supposition.[4] The Princes are told twice over to lift up their gates, that the King of Glory may come in. It must have been an occasion the heavenly pomp and splendour of which thrilled the whole host of the angels with astonishment, awe, and the purest and intensest joy.

These truths cannot but raise considerably our ideas about this entrance of our Lord in His Sacred Humanity into the Heavenly Kingdom which He had won by His Passion. We see Him accompanied by a large company of His redeemed, some in body as well as in soul, some only in soul. Heaven is already the possession of the children of men. When the commentators on Sacred Scripture try to imagine who may have been the saints who accompanied our Lord in their glorified bodies, they naturally enough include among them the nearest

4 Psalm xxiii.

relatives and friends of our Lord, such as St. Joachim, St. Anne, and the Blessed Joseph. At such an enumeration the Christian reason pauses, as if struck by the absence of a name which it instinctively feels ought to be there. What if, as some contemplatives tell us, the Blessed Mother accompanied her Son to take possession of her glory, derived from His?

In forming an estimate of such conjectures, we must first of all be secure that, although they may be no more than conjectures, they are at all events in perfect harmony with Christian and theological reason. The Ascension of our Lord was His solemn taking possession, not only of the throne of glory at the right hand of the Father for Himself, but also of the Kingdom of Heaven for the whole multitude of the redeemed. It was the achievement of our Lord in His Human Nature, in the Body and the Soul which He had taken to His own Person when He became Man. It was the triumph of His Sacred Humanity, by the merits of which it is that Heaven has been won for us, won for us in soul and body both. As has just now been said, the Christian commentators have been guided by a beautiful instinct in their determination as to some particular saints who may have accompanied our Lord in body and in soul both. Who are these saints? They are, or at least among them are, those who are nearest and closest to His Sacred Humanity itself. How can we see the beauty of this imagination, if it be but an imagination, without also seeing that the Blessed Mother of our Lord, of whose substance His Body was formed, who bore Him in her womb, nursed Him at her breasts, and was so ineffably

united to Him during the whole of His earthly course, was incomparably nearer and closer to Him than any of the nearest and closest of the saints? She was the greatest trophy, so to say, of His work on earth, in life and death, for she had a larger share in its fruits than all the Saints together. How is it possible, therefore, for the Christian intelligence not to long to know that, as she had been so inseparable from Him in His Passion, so also she had her own unique share in His triumph?

The contemplative[5] of whose work so much use has already been made in these chapters, tells us that our Blessed Lady was marvellously raised in company with her Son and His saints to Heaven on this occasion, in order that she might with Him take possession of the state of glory, in proportion to her ineffable and inconceivable merits. She remained visibly upon earth, as St. Paul may have been visible when he was caught up to the third heaven, and heard the unspeakable words of which he writes to the Corinthians.[6] She describes her reception by the Three Persons of the Ever Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the special glory and throne which were allotted to her, and the like. She goes on to contemplate how our Blessed Lady might, in the decrees of God, have remained in Heaven in perpetual possession of her reward, but that it was the will of God, with the condition of her own choice and consent, that she should return for awhile to earth to be the light and guide of the Church, representing to her most

5 M. de Agreda, *Mistica Citta*, p. 2, lib. vi. c. 29.
6 2 Cor. xii. 1—5.

perfectly the image and character and example of our Blessed Lord. She speaks of our Blessed Lady, prostrate at the feet of God, understanding that she had power to exert her own choice and will in this matter, acknowledging the immense benefit of the grace which was offered to her, understanding most perfectly what it was for her to enjoy God in the state of glory, and to be for ever united in the closest companionship with her Son and His saints. But Mary recognized also that her remaining yet awhile on earth, among the faithful of the infant Church, would be greatly to the glory of God, and for their consolation and advantage, although much toil and travail to her, besides that it involved her absence from Heaven. So she offered herself as a sacrifice to the love of God for men, and implored the Divine assistance and guidance in the work she undertook, that it might help to the spread of the holy Faith, the exaltation of His Holy Name, and the multiplication and advance of the Holy Church.

The Catholic Church has never formally set her seal to revelations of this kind, further, at least, than by tolerating them, when they contain nothing that is contrary to the faith or to Sacred Scripture and holy tradition. The faithful are free to feed their devotion upon them, and in numberless cases this devotion has been fruitful of great spiritual enlightenment, of advance in confidence in the power of God and of His saints, and in many other ways which need not here be enumerated. What must be sufficiently ascertained, in cases like that before us, is that they contain nothing which is unreasonable

to the Christian mind. The elements in the picture here presented to us by Maria de Agreda, as to which question or difficulty might be raised, may be said to be three. In the first place, there is the elevation of our Blessed Lady, while as yet mortal, to the highest heaven, and this apparently, in body as well as in spirit. She may indeed have been caught up in spirit only, but we may deal with the contemplation most fairly by supposing that she is said to have been raised to both. Now we believe as certain, on the words of Scripture,[7] that there is nothing in this, either beyond God's power, or beyond what is related of himself by St. Paul. It is true that St. Paul says, that he cannot tell whether he was caught up into Heaven in the body, or out of the body. But the fact that he speaks in this way shows sufficiently that either of the alternatives was possible. If it had been impossible, or contrary to the methods of God, for him to have been caught up in the body as well as in spirit, he could not have used the language which he does use.

So far, then, we find no difficulty. Another element as to which question might be raised is, that, if our Lady was taken up into Heaven in body and spirit both, she must have been seen ascending by the Apostles and the other faithful collected on Mount Olivet. This however does not at all follow, for in the instances which are recorded in the lives of the saints, as when by the gift of reduplication they are seen in two places at once, they are not seen to leave the place in which they were at first, or to pass from that to the other in which they are seen by those

7 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3.

who are there present. In the same way a third difficulty is answered, which is grounded on the presence of our Blessed Lady with the Apostles and faithful, when they returned from the Ascension. The analogy of reduplication would lead us to suppose that she would not be missed by her earthly companions, as St. Francis Xavier and St. Francis Jerome were not missed in the instances recorded in their lives, and as St. Alphonsus remained in his monastery while he was transferred to Rome to assist Clement the Fourteenth on his death-bed. We know little enough of the laws by which such marvellous occurrences are regulated. But features which are common to many of them may be accepted as answers to objections, when they are not branded by any authoritative disapproval.

There is, therefore, nothing in this contemplation which can be objected to as wanting support in what we know of God's dealings with His servants. If there is any well grounded objection to it, it must be found in the silence of Scripture and tradition. As to the silence of Scripture, it has already been said over and over again, how dangerous it is to found a peremptory argument on this. The silence of tradition furnishes the more important argument of the two. But it is not peremptory in cases like this of which we are speaking, when the question is only of the pious beliefs which have grown up in the Church, especially concerning our Blessed Lady. These beliefs fill up a number of gaps in the sacred history, which seem to call for supplement by the workings in the souls of the children of the Church of the spirit of prayer and contemplation, and the

grateful recognition on their part of their relations to their Blessed Mother. The history of the Ascension of our Lord belongs to the same class of narratives as the history of the Resurrection. We know that in the case of the Resurrection there is an entire silence over the whole Forty Days as to the dealings of our Lord with His Blessed Mother. It would be absurd and irreverent, and disrespectful in the highest degree, to conclude, therefore, that there were no such dealings at all. When once the Ascension is considered in the same way, it will seem to be entirely in harmony with the beautiful arrangements of God, both that there should have been some very special favours bestowed on our Blessed Lady at a time of so much magnificence and tenderness, and also that the details of these favours should have been passed over in silence in the narratives of the Evangelists, which do not in any way at all touch on what we have called the heavenly part of this great mystery. It remains, that in whatever way the pious imagination fills up the picture for itself, in accordance with the principles of the faith and the analogies of God's ways, this should at least be done by introducing no circumstances which are in their kind contrary to those principles and those analogies. But it is not easy to find, in the revelation of which we are speaking, anything which can be thus characterized. This is enough for the present purpose, at least as to the first part of the contemplation of which we are speaking, that namely which represents our Blessed Lady as present in Heaven at the solemn Ascension of her Son.

It remains to say a few words as to the kind of

choice which is said, in the second place, to have been offered to Mary, whether to be assumed at once and for all into Heaven, as Christians believe that she was assumed after her blessed death, or to remain behind her Son on the earth, when so many of the saints were called to share His glory. That our Blessed Lady did so remain for the greater glory of God and for the good of the Church, is an historical fact which no one can call in question. That, if it was so, her will and choice were entirely in harmony with the will of God, must be self-evident to all Christian minds. There can be no doubt that she accepted the decree, or the proposal, of her remaining on earth yet awhile, at least in the same spirit, but with far more fervour and intensity of love and of self-sacrifice, than have been shown by those of the saints of which something of the kind is related. "To me," says St. Paul, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain. And if to live in the flesh, this is to me the fruit of labour. And what I shall choose I know not. But I am straitened between two, having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh, is needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith."[8] What words can be more completely in harmony with the choice of our Blessed Lady as described in this contemplation? St. Paul certainly speaks as if he had a choice put before him between two alternatives. But if this was so with St. Paul, it is unreasonable to say that it

[8] Philipp. i. 21—25.

might not much more have been the case with our Blessed Lady, of whom her Creator would not even take flesh in her virginal womb, without her full and express consent. And if it is so greatly to the honour of St. Paul, as St. Chrysostom draws it out in his commentary on this passage, that he should have made the choice which he did make, that may be fairly considered as an intimation that such a choice was the best of the two. St. Paul "chose the best part," as the Church says of our Blessed Mother, and why then should it be a difficulty that Mary should have had a like option, and have made her own choice in the same perfect way?

Indeed, the readiness to remain awhile on earth, in order to labour more for the glory of God, is not an uncommon feature in the great sanctity of His servants. The choice of St. Martin is well known, as well as the declaration of St. Ignatius that, even if he were certain of eternal glory if he were to die at once, he would still be ready to remain below, as has been said, uncertain of Heaven, if by so doing he could serve his Lord more. The circumstances under which this choice was made by St. Paul, and those under which a similar choice is said by some of the contemplatives to have been made by our Blessed Lady, are indeed very different. But the difference only shows the transcendent merit of the renunciation of immediate glory by Mary, as well as the immense service which it was open to her to render to the Church by her fifteen years of survival after the Ascension. Thus the contemplation sheds a fresh light on the importance, in the counsels of God, of the presence of the Blessed Mother in the

infancy of the Church, as her presence and service was of infinite moment in the Infancy of our Lord Himself.

Nor can any one fairly object to such a use of the recorded perfections of grace, in the lives of the great saints of God, as is here made to illustrate the unwritten magnificence of the workings of grace in His Blessed Mother. What is told us of St. John Baptist's sanctification in his mother's womb, and of the accelerated use of his intellectual faculties, is made an illustration by Christian theologians of the similar though greater graces granted to Mary in her Infancy. Enoch and Elias, and St. Paul caught up into the third Heaven, whether in the body or out of the body we know not, may be cited in the same way as to the mystery before us. What the same great Apostle says about his own choice, while preparing, with no slight human apprehension, to stand before the tribunal of Nero, cannot be refused as an illustration of this particular instance in the long chain of the most perfect choices of Mary. All over the Sacred Scriptures, the New Testament as well as the Old, there are thus scattered hints and fragments which enable us to complete the picture of her glories. In the case of the Old Testament, we are able to say to ourselves, that many of these hints and typical incidents are there recorded for this especial purpose. What if it should turn out, when we come to understand the New Testament also and the lives of the saints in the light of Heaven, that these beautiful manifestations of grace have also been made known to the children of Mary upon earth, for the same purpose?

CHAPTER III.

MARY IN THE CENACLE.

It is natural for the children of the Church to follow in heart Mary and the Apostles, with the rest of that holy company assembled in the Cenacle, during the ten days which intervened between the Ascension of our Lord and the Day of Pentecost. Our Lord's command to them had been simply that they should remain in the city of Jerusalem, until they had been endowed with power from on high. But those loving hearts, to whom He addressed this command, would instinctively understand that He meant them to occupy themselves in prayer and communion with God until the time came for the fulfilment of the promise, especially as He told them that that fulfilment would take place "not many days hence." This, then, thus became, as we may say, the first Christian retreat made in community by the Church, and it is probably on this account that so many religious bodies and persons in all ages of the Church have delighted in spending in this manner the ten days before Pentecost, on which feast it is often their rule to make elections, and other decisions to which great importance is attached.

It may be supposed that the faithful band collected for prayer, and which consisted, as St. Luke tells us, of the eleven Apostles, our Lady, the holy women, and our Lord's brethren, may have understood that the great Gift which was promised to them consisted in the presence, in a new and ineffable manner, of the Holy Ghost. It is called by our Lord the promise of the Father, power from on high, the power of the Holy Ghost. It is generally understood that the doctrine of the Three Persons in the One Godhead was not so clearly revealed under the Old Testament as in the New, and thus, in a number, even of our Lord's disciples, there may have been inadequate ideas about the Person and Office of the Holy Ghost. Many truths concerning Him had been brought forward by our Lord in the later stages of His teaching, especially in the discourse after the Last Supper, which is recorded by St. John. But it must be also certain that a great many more such truths remained as yet undeveloped, and that there must have been many differences in the degrees of knowledge on this Divine subject possessed by different persons.

As we have understood the Blessed Mother of our Lord to have been filled with the Holy Ghost from the very beginning, and we cannot doubt but that she possessed an immense gift of enlightenment concerning His Person, the effects of His presence in the soul, and the various measures of His communications. This must have raised her intelligent expectations and ardent desires, with regard to the promised Gift, to a height unattained by others,

and her prayers must have been poured forth with proportionate energy and intensity. The prayers of our Blessed Lady and of the Church had an efficacy of their own in drawing down the Divine Gift, in the same way as the prayers of the ancient Patriarchs and saints brought on the accomplishment of the promise of the Incarnation, although in each case the boon was the free gift of God, unattainable by created merit. We are thus led to contemplate the prayer of our Lady, especially, as dwelling on the various truths concerning the Holy Ghost which had been revealed to her, and particularly those chief characteristics of His office, which had been selected by our Lord in His discourse concerning Him before the accomplishment of the Passion. Under these heads, as they are contained in the last discourse after the Last Supper, we may group the subjects on which our Blessed Mother's prayer was now occupied.

We may remember also that our Lady was fresh from the wonderful revelations of human malice and depravity, the manifestation of what St. Paul calls the works of the flesh, which had been made in the Passion. No one ever understood so perfectly as Mary the depths and misery of sin, in all its innumerable phases, though she by the special graces vouchsafed to her had no experience of these miseries in her own person. She read them in their effects on the most Pure and Holy Victim Whose office it was to expiate them by His sufferings. Nor did any one understand so perfectly that other deep source of humility in the intelligence of which she so faithfully followed her Son, the contemplation

of the utter nothingness of all creatures in the presence of God. From both these considerations Mary could draw a most marvellous intelligence of the need which man had of the creating and renovating Spirit, and of the magnificent degree to which He was to repair and restore, and strengthen and enlighten and fertilize the poor soil of our human nature in this great outpouring which was the fruit of the Passion of our Lord. We must measure the considerations of our Blessed Lady on the great Gift of the Holy Ghost by her knowledge of the weakness and helplessness of human nature without Him, of the degradation of that nature by sin, original and actual, as well as by her perfect knowledge of the Divine Person Who was now to impart Himself and make Himself present in a new way and degree, both in the Church as a body and in the souls and hearts of her children.

The full doctrine of the Church concerning the Holy Ghost as the Gift of God, and the measure and manner of His presence as it began to be after the Day of Pentecost, as compared with the same presence before the glorification of our Lord, belongs rather to the history of our Lord Himself, as it is drawn out elsewhere. But it belongs to our attempt faithfully to follow out our Blessed Lady's part in the Sacred Mysteries, of which it was the will of God that she should be a witness and a partaker, to consider how very deep must have been her knowledge on these matters, how ardent her prayer, founded upon that knowledge, how intense the joy with which she looked forward to this most wonder-

ful boon. She could understand, more than any other, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Ghost as they are drawn out for us by Isaias and by St. Paul—the beauty which they would confer on the souls of men, the strength and light and supernatural instincts which they would bring with them. She had been able to trace most accurately the workings of the Holy Ghost in the character, the actions, the words, and whole demeanour, of her Divine Son. That beautiful study of this most wonderful history was her continual occupation, and had been carried on by her during the whole of His life with an intelligence surpassing that with which the heavenly citizens themselves had looked down, with their most eager gaze, on that marvellous revelation of God. The catalogue of the fruits of the Holy Ghost as it is given us by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians,[1] reads like a simple description of the character of our Lord, as it was manifested to men, and most clearly of all to His Blessed Mother. And now she knew that that character was to be reproduced by the Holy Ghost Himself in the souls of thousands and thousands of the children of God, indeed, that it was to be the norm and type of the whole multitude of the faithful, the working of the Holy Ghost in whom was fitly to be described by the Apostle as the formation of Christ in them. She had already rejoiced over the high sanctity which had been reached by the Apostles, St. Peter, St. John, and the rest, the holy women, Magdalene and her companions, and she knew that this was but the beginning of a process which was to attain far

[1] Galat. v. 22, 23.

larger and higher developments than any that had as yet been seen.

Moreover, our Blessed Lady could regard the Gift of God as it came from Heaven in His own intention, fraught with powers and graces and glories far greater than any that might actually result from its presence, on account of the poor cooperation of men, even of the most saintly, to the boundless beneficence of God. She understood the power of the Gift, and the infinite merits of the Sacrifice by which it had been purchased. She could take the promises of our Lord, as they are recorded for us by St. John, at their full meaning, though she might know that there might be failures in the absolute and perfect accomplishment, in all the extent, of those promises, on account of the unfaithfulness of many among those to whom they were made. Thus she could look forward to the whole boon contained in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as our Lord had meant when He said that He should abide with them for ever, abide with them and be in them. She knew all that was intended when our Lord had said that the Paraclete would teach them all things, and bring all things to their minds, whatsoever He Himself had said to them. Here was a limitless promise of illuminations to the truth, and it would sound sweeter than ever when it was connected with the bringing to their remembrance everything that our Lord had Himself taught, and which they might not have been able at the time to understand. Then again there was the great promise as to the effect of the manifestation of the Holy Ghost to the world,

that convincing of sin, of justice, and of judgment, in which our Lord summed up the action of the Paraclete in bringing home to the world the sin of infidelity, in the great display of evangelical justice and the most grand and heroic virtues, which His action in the saints and in the Church was to produce, and in the confusion and condemnation and destruction of the usurped kingdom of Satan, which was to fall to pieces before the light and preaching of the Gospel Kingdom.[2]

There was also another great promise, conveyed, like so many other of the promises of our Lord, in the fewest possible words, according to which the Holy Ghost was to teach the Apostles and the Church the things which were to come. Under this simple statement might be conveyed immense blessings which our Blessed Lady could understand, not only in the permanence of the gift of prophecy in the Church, but in that revelation of the future glories of Heaven which is laid open by His action in the souls in whom He delights to dwell. Thus the office of the Paraclete, as sketched in a few words by our Lord, might lie open to the intelligence of His Mother as a perfect and complete renovation, and the establishment of a new Kingdom, penetrating the hearts and souls of the children of the Church, making them in a most true sense His temples and dwellings, flooding them with heavenly light, bringing out in lines of heavenly beauty the whole meaning of our Lord's various teachings and instructions and prophecies, showing the perfect harmony and interdependence of the

[2] St. John xiv. 16—26; xvi. 8—11.

whole system of doctrine and practice, sacraments and ordinances, which He left behind Him, opening Heaven, as well as the earthly portion of His institutions, and at the same time confronting the world and putting it to shame and silence before the presence of the truth, and of that glorious reproduction of the Life of our Lord which was to be displayed in the saints and in the Church, and scattering the infernal enemies of God and man by the brightness and might of the powers of the world to come.

We are not told at what particular time the retreat, as we should say, of the holy company in the Cenacle was interrupted for the purpose of the election of an Apostle in the place of the poor traitor Judas. It can hardly be doubted that St. Peter and the rest must have received some instruction from our Lord on this subject. For it would have been perfectly easy for Him to have nominated a successor to the lost Apostle if that had been His will, and the person so chosen might have seemed to be endowed with greater authority if he had come before the world as the choice of our Lord Himself. There may have been many Divine reasons for this counsel of God, whereby the twelfth witness of the Resurrection was to be chosen by the Church herself. It gave an opportunity for the exercise of her sovereign power in such arrangements, and it also gave an opportunity to St. Peter for the first exercise of the primacy with which He had been solemnly invested on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias. Answering to this exercise of authority, on the part of St. Peter, was the ready

and most unquestioning acquiescence of the rest of the Apostles and of the infant Church in that exercise. Perhaps also it was well to set before the faithful this method of election as one which might be considered in itself the most regular and normal in the filling up of posts of authority and importance, although other ways were to be adopted under particular circumstances and when the mode of proceeding by election was comparatively inexpedient, or was impossible.

The occasion was grave, because it set before the minds of the Apostles and of the faithful that one of the most highly favoured of their own body, one who had shared the commission to preach and to work miracles in the Name of our Lord, as well as the other more intimate privileges of the Apostolate, had fallen away, through yielding to a very common temptation, and had been led by the fiend who had triumphed over his loyalty to our Lord, to a crime in itself most shameful, and involving an issue no less terrible than that of the murder of his Master. The fall of Judas was not to them a provocation to anger and hatred against the poor traitor, so much as a solemn warning reminding them of their own great weakness, and it seems to be in this spirit that St. Peter and the historian of the incident, St. Luke, dwell upon the crime and its punishment. "Judas hath by transgression fallen, that he might go to his own place."

The choice of the humble St. Mathias is sometimes thought to have been determined, as far as it was determined by the faithful themselves, by the consideration that Joses or Barsabas, the other

person put, as we should say, in nomination, was a very near relation to our Lord, having already one if not two brothers among the Apostles. If this was the case, the election was a sort of protest by anticipation against the influence of considerations of birth or connections and the like, in the selection of the high ministers of the Church. For it cannot certainly be thought that Barsabas, whose name afterwards occurs in the sacred history as that of a distinguished saint, could have been unfit for the great office for which he seems to have been the first to be named. If we consider what may have been the part of the Blessed Mother of our Lord on this occasion, we can find no better answer than that it must have been to her a matter of the most fervent prayer. She represented in the early Church, as during the life of our Lord, the thousands of holy and retired souls who were to be in all ages of the Church the silent mainstays of the work to be carried on by her active and authoritative ministers, whose prayers were to help the Pontiffs on their thrones, the bishops in their sees, the clergy and the missionaries all over the world, to furnish grace and light to the doctors and teachers and controversialists, to nerve the courage of the martyrs, the constancy of the confessors, and guard the purity of the virgins consecrated to God. All these holy souls, whether collected in communities under religious vows, or serving God in their own homes, in the solitude of the desert, or the hermitage, are in a most true sense the children of Mary in this her own particular work of self-sacrifice, immolation, and intercession. The special times and

seasons which the Church sets apart for prayer and fasting for the ministers whom her pastors ordain from time to time, are repetitions of this holy period of prayer passed in the Cenacle, in which Mary was the centre around which the whole Church was then gathered.

It is in harmony with these considerations that we should think of the new member of the Apostolical body as the object of the special care and solicitude of the Blessed Mother. She had prayed long and with intense earnestness for the poor outcast Judas, and had grieved over the triumph of Satan in his case with a depth of sorrow exceeded only by that of the Sacred Heart of her Son. To her Mathias came in the place of Judas, like a new child granted to a mother who had lost one on whom she had spent care and love in vain. The ministers of the Church, and especially all that are in any position of prominence and exceptionally high authority, must always be the objects of fervent intercession to such hearts as hers. But for St. Mathias she must have felt a special anxiety and tenderness, founded, not on any features in his character which might cause apprehension, but on the simple history of the soul in whose place he was now called to bear witness to the Resurrection of our Lord. His name is never mentioned again in the sacred history, but he is said to have preached in Ethiopia and Arabia, and latterly in Palestine itself, where he laid down his life for the faith. The Church reads on his festival the beautiful words of our Lord, in which He gave thanks to His Father that He had hid the mysteries of the Gospel from

the wise and prudent, and had revealed them to little ones. We may gather from this that his characteristic grace was humility—the one grace which can secure the hearts in which it dwells from falls like that of Judas.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY AT THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

Our Blessed Lord speaks,[1] in the discourse after the Last Supper, of His asking the Father that He would send the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, as well of His own sending the same Divine Person. Our theology teaches us that the Mission of the Holy Ghost was a joint act both of the Father and of the Son. The meaning of the language of our Lord as to asking the Father seems to be that He had purchased by His merits in His Human Nature the great boon of the Mission of the Holy Ghost, which was in this respect unlike His own Mission as the Son of God in His Incarnation. There had not been, and there could not have been, in the Incarnation, any merit preceding, by virtue of which it might have been won from God. Whereas, in the case of the Mission of the Holy Ghost, our Lord's own merits had preceded and furnished a title by which that Mission might be granted, not out of simple mercy and compassion alone, but also as an act of justice. And when our Lord mentions that He will

[1] St. John xiv. 16.

ask the Father, He refers to a solemn act by which in His Sacred Humanity He begged this grace of the Father, by virtue of the merits of His Life and Passion. This solemn act must have taken place in Heaven during the ten days which intervened beween the Ascension and the fulfilment of the days of Pentecost, and we cannot doubt that the Blessed Mother was allowed to be aware of this petition of her Divine Son, and enabled also to accompany it, in her own way and measure, by the most fervent prayer and supplication. She may also have known when the appointed time was come for the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and indeed it seems to have been known, by some Divine instinct, to the little body of the faithful that something great was about to happen, when they assembled themselves as of one accord on the Day of Pentecost.

The great boon of this new presence of the Holy Ghost, with His gifts and fruits and the powers which were thereby conveyed to the souls of the faithful in various degrees, according to the capacity and merits of each, was internal. It might have been communicated, as His gifts are now communicated, without any exterior manifestation by which the Divine action might be recognized. But it was not so to be in the dispensation of the Incarnation. At our Lord's own Baptism, and on the occasion of the Transfiguration, there had been some external sign by which the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him had been made known to St. John and to the three disciples on the holy mountain. And there may have been many Divine reasons why something of the same kind should accompany the descent of

the Holy Ghost upon the Visible Church of God on those great occasions. He usually acts silently and imperceptibly, but it was well that there should be something now to mark His presence, in harmony with the general economy of the Incarnation, and that this should contain a sign which might instruct men as to the purpose for which this presence of His was now vouchsafed. All these conditions are found in the circumstances of His descent on the Church on the Day of Pentecost. The sound as of "a mighty wind coming" must have been heard in the city by others as well as by the Apostles and their companions, and must have been the means of bringing to the spot the crowd which was immediately addressed by St. Peter. The tongues of fire were significant as pointing out the individual and personal character of the gifts now bestowed, which could not have been gathered so well from the sign of the rushing wind. The tongues also signified the purpose of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the members of the Church, as it is said in the Pentecostal hymn:

> Linguis ut essent proflui,
> Et caritate fervidi—

that they were to be animated by the most fervent charity, and that they were to communicate the truths which they had to deliver to the world by means of speech. Faith was to be the condition of salvation, and faith was to come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Christian art has always delighted to paint the Blessed Mother of God in the midst of the Apostles

on the Day of Pentecost, and there can be no doubt that this pious instinct represents both the truth of the fact and the tradition of the Church. Although she could have no part in the preaching of the Word of God, Mary was to receive on this great occasion a measure of the blessing now accorded to the Church, which was altogether singular and unique. For the presence of the Holy Ghost was conferred on the hearts and souls of the faithful there assembled, in proportion to the fitness of each for the reception of greater or lesser measures of grace, and in this sense the words of our Lord came true on this occasion, that "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly." According to this rule, the share of our Blessed Lady would be far greater than the shares of all the rest together in the increase of sanctifying grace.

The Church believes that at this time the Apostles were confirmed in grace, as well as filled with the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, whether in order to their own sanctification, or to the discharge of their great office to souls, in proportion to the immense graces which they had already received from the free bounty of God, and on account of their own faithful cooperation. Our Lady was confirmed in grace, as it is natural to think, long before this moment, and her graces of the order of sanctification were in proportion to nothing less than the dignity of the Mother of God and the close companion of our Lord throughout the whole of His Life, as well as to her cooperation, which had been proceeding without any rest or pause from the first moment of her sanctification at the time of her

Immaculate Conception. Moreover, if we consider as certain that she was left on earth for the particular purpose of assisting the Church in those first beginnings, in some specially powerful manner, as its Mother, in fulfilment of the word which had been spoken to her from the Cross by her Divine Son, it is clear that we must also suppose as certain that, in accordance with the ordinary rule of the action of God in such cases, Mary was endowed with special graces for the perfect execution of the office which that word conferred upon her.

This office in many respects passed beyond that which she had always exercised as the most faithful disciple and scholar of our Lord, and as His constant assistant in the course of His Public Life. If the Apostles were the Fathers of the Church, as St. Paul speaks of himself in relation to his converts, our Lady was the Mother of all the faithful. The mother's office has not the authority of the father. It is an office of influence and affection, although it involves duties both on the mother's side and on the children's side. But it has a very wide range indeed, and a character of its own, a character of immense charity, of endless watchfulness, of the most tender and self-sacrificing care, of indulgence, and sympathy, of an instinctive sense of whatever is dangerous or helpful to the children, and of boundless compassion for their weaknesses, and even for their failings, and mistakes, and misfortunes. When the child is in trouble, the mother does not think of the faults by which the misery has been incurred, but of the misery itself. She leaves the question of justice to the father, or rather she pleads with all her power in bar of the strictest justice.

Again, our Blessed Lady never lost the impression of Calvary, not only in her tender sense of the enormous sufferings of our Lord, but in the new and deep penetration with which it armed her as to the value of the souls for which so great a price had been paid, and in her most burning zeal for the secure and efficient application to them of the full merits of the Precious Blood. The effect, on the saints of God, of the constant contemplation of the Passion, is not only the deepest contrition and compassion, but the most intense charity. This truth must never be forgotten in our considerations as to our Blessed Lady after the Passion, which wrought a far greater increase of yearning for the salvation and perfection of souls in her, than it could work in all the saints together. Now that she was left on earth, as we have said, especially for the sake of the souls whom her presence might help in so many wonderful ways, now that her heart was all aflame for the execution of her commission, and now that the great gift was sent from Heaven which was to fit the members of the Church for their various duties in the great work of the Gospel, it is natural to think that Mary must have received some very magnificent dower of the graces of the Holy Ghost to enable her to discharge her own tender and noble work.

The description of the external incidents of the Day of Pentecost belongs rather to the history of the Church as a body than to that of Mary. But her great part in the whole mystery can never be omitted, without making the history of the Church incomplete. The first external incident seems to have been a great manifestation of the presence of

the Holy Ghost in the kind of ecstatic delight and joy, passing from the soul to the body, which took possession of the whole collected body of the Apostles and disciples. They broke out into praises of God, thanksgivings, expressions of adoration, and the like, and in these it became evident that their thoughts and words were not their own, and that they were even speaking in new languages. Their holy tranquil enthusiasm was something altogether unearthly, and they became scarcely masters of themselves in their joy, and in their expression of it. The noise of the wind, and perhaps other portents, seem to have drawn the multitude of which the history speaks to the neighbourhood of the Cenacle, where there must have been some open space capable of receiving so large a crowd. It is clear that there must have been a reason for their collecting, and the fact that the disciples were talking in various tongues, or even had the fiery tongues visible over them, could not have become known of itself all over the city.

When the multitude was collected, St. Peter made his speech, as St. Luke relates. It is characteristic of this speech, as of others contained in this history, that there is no argument at all used to prove the truth of our Lord's Resurrection except that of the witness of the Apostles, illustrated, indeed, by the prophecy of David in the Psalms. St. Peter explains that the marvels which his audience witnessed were but the fulfilment of other prophecies about the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. But the pith, so to say, of his speech is contained in the words, "This Jesus hath God raised up again,

whereof all we are witnesses. Being exalted therefore by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost"—that is, the Holy Ghost Who had been promised—"He hath poured forth this which you see and hear."[2] There is one circumstance in the scene which must have been providentially ordered for a special purpose. The feast of Pentecost, like the other two great feasts of the Jewish calendar, would certainly always attract to Jerusalem a large number of Jews resident in foreign countries. In this respect there would be no difference between the feast of Pentecost and the others. But it is certainly remarkable that on this occasion the crowd which was collected to hear the Apostles is said to have been made up in great measure of these foreign Jews, rather than of the inhabitants of Jerusalem or of the Holy Land. When we think of the crowd which assembled outside the Prætorium at the Passion to force on Pilate the execution of our Lord, we think of them as Jews of Jerusalem and Palestine, rather than as foreigners. Here we have a crowd of foreigners, and St. Luke gives us a long list of the different parts of the world to which they belonged. The miracle of the tongues would be unintelligible without this, and we must therefore consider it as a divinely ordained circumstance that so many of these foreigners should have met at the spot outside the Cenacle.

It appears probable that the miracle of the tongues was wrought in the way in which similar miracles have been from time to time wrought in

[2] Acts ii. 33.

the subsequent ages of the Church. That is, the Apostles spoke in their own language, and the words fell on the ears of the hearers in the language to which they were accustomed. Otherwise, it is clear, there might possibly have been very great confusion, if one Apostle spoke one language for one set of foreigners, another for another, and so on. There was also present a large body of Jews of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, as would seem from the exordium of St. Peter's address. Afterwards, when he speaks to the "men of Israel," it would seem that he included the foreigners. And at the end of the whole, when he exhorts them to receive Baptism, he says, "The promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, whomsoever the Lord our God shall call,"[3] words which seem to include the Gentiles as well as the Jews "of the dispersion." Thus at the very outset of the preaching of the Church, there was a foreshadowing of what St. Paul calls the mystery, "which in other generations was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and prophets in the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of the promise in Jesus Christ by the Gospel."[4] The accomplishment of this mystery was to be, as we shall see, to the minds of the first faithful, a novelty of the most astounding character, and it is well to note in the earlier stages of the history the succession of hints and sayings by which their minds were prepared for the disclosure.

Christian contemplatives will see in all these

3 Acts ii. 39. 4 Ephes. iii. 5, 6.

circumstances of the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Church and her children, most abundant matter for the unceasing and most heavenly thanksgiving and prayer in which it was our Blessed Lady's special office to occupy herself, on occasion of the great mysteries of salvation, as they succeeded one another in the Life of our Lord and in the subsequent history of His Kingdom. No one could understand as she could the immensity of the boon which was conferred on the world, or see, as she could, the promise of the future glories of the Church in the marvellous incidents of that glorious morning. The efficacy of the Apostles' preaching, the blessing which attends the Word of God, the interior movements of the Holy Spirit in the hearts alike of preacher and hearers, the wonders of conversion, the grace of Baptism, the formation of the believers into one Body under the rule of the appointed ministers, the spread of these blessings into all the lands from which the multitude had been collected, and beyond them, over the whole world, the admission of all the nations among which these Jews were sojourners, and of the whole race of Adam, to the fruits of the Incarnation and Passion, all the heights of interior sanctity to which men were to be raised by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and the mighty achievements of the servants of God and the glories to which they would lead—all were calmly and devoutly counted over in the mind and heart of Mary.

It is natural to think that there must have been a great number of circumstances on which St. Luke does not linger. Each one of the converts had a

history, each one was the object of a peculiar tenderness on the part of her who had been made the Mother of all. There must have been some short course of instruction at which the Apostles and disciples must have laboured, perhaps with the help of the holy women and of our Blessed Lady in the case of converts of their own sex. There must have been the first solemn administration of Baptism to numbers at a time, and then the preparation of the newly baptized for the reception of other sacraments, Penance, Confirmation, the Blessed Eucharist. There must have been the blessed beginning of what was never to cease throughout all ages in the Catholic Church, the assembling of the faithful in crowds, as far as circumstances allowed, to hear Mass, and the holy and joyous scene of general Communion. And growing out of all these, there must have been, under the eyes of our Blessed Mother, the instruction and formation of a Christian community, thoroughly penetrated by the spirit of charity and mutual love, a glorious anticipation of the worldwide Church in every age and in every land.

It must be remembered that, in such works of God as the formation of Christian society, although there are developments and phases which naturally come later in the history, there is always at the very first a very peculiar outpouring of grace, the fruits of which have a beauty and purity all their own. The Church was to grow in external amplitude and power, and by the side of the proportions of her later greatness the infant community at Jerusalem may seem insignificant. But nevertheless we are

justified in thinking that in the intensity of their charity and union, as in other points for which the highest spiritual perfection is required, the first members of the Church of Jerusalem have seldom been surpassed, or even equalled. The simple modest words of St. Luke are enough to be made the foundation of long meditations on this early springtide, this sudden tropical burst of beauties and glories, which made it at once more like the ripe maturity of a splendid summer. "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles," that is, they fed themselves continually on the Word of God, as set before them by the appointed teachers of the Church. "And in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayer," that is, in the frequentation of the sacraments, attendance at the Holy Sacrifice, and in the praises of God and prayer to God, public as well as private. For it was understood in the Church from the very first that Christian prayer, public and private, was to be the great ordinary and appointed instrument by means of which the blessings of grace were to be obtained for all.

Having said this, the Evangelist next subjoins a few words which describe the external position of the Church and the Apostles, of which we may have to say more in another chapter. "Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles in Jerusalem, and there was great fear on all"—the holy loving fear which is produced on simple pure hearts when they feel that God is close to them, around them on every side, and within them. Then comes the external fruit of the true spirit of charity among the faithful. "And all they

that believed, were together, and had all things common. They sold their possessions and goods, and divided them to all, according as every man had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread "from house to house," for the celebration of the Christian Mysteries could not take place ordinarily in public, "they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people," for the jealousy of the priests was not yet aroused, and the beauty of the Christian character could not but attract love. "And the Lord added daily to their society such as should be saved."[5]

This description only requires to be expanded in meditation, in order to give us an account of the many new subjects of thanksgiving and intercession which must have crowded upon the loving heart of Mary, in consequence of the doings of this glorious Day of Pentecost. The obedience to the Church, the fruitfulness of the instructions of her prelates and of the sacraments and other means of grace which they administered, the pure fire of charity working out its blessed effects on the hearts and in the lives of the infant community, the attitude towards that community of the world outside, the Temple authorities, and the people at large, and, above all, the daily accession to the Church of new children, young in the faith and in the practice of Christian virtue, and exposed to many temptations and dangers of which they had little thought—all these things must have passed through the mind of

5 Acts ii. 47.

the Blessed Mother and have risen up to Heaven on the incense of her prayer. It was indeed a beautiful spring-time, the promise of which needed much intercession to strengthen it for endurance unto the harvest.

Nor must it be omitted, that if the crowd of new children added to the Church awakened in the heart of Mary a most intense motherly love and care for their right nurture and education in the holy law to which they had become subject, there must also have been, on their part, a very great and eager desire to see and converse with the Mother of their Saviour, Whom great numbers of these new disciples had probably never seen. This was a part of the office of Mary in that infancy of the Church, a part of the immense benefit which those first Christians derived from her presence among them, that she represented far more perfectly than any one else could represent, the character, the personal presence, the ways of thought and look and speech and action of her Divine Son. While she was with them, our Lord was reflected among them in a manner and degree which could never be quite perpetuated afterwards, and that gracious Lady, with all her recollection and love of retirement and of solitude with God, would not deny to those youngest members of the great family the satisfaction of their pious cravings, from which they might derive so much light and strength for the conflicts to which they were so soon to be exposed. The mere presence or nearness of our Lord, even at such times as when He was asleep in the boat, were virtually a great help and a great joy, and a great encouragement to

His disciples. Now He was in Heaven, no more to be seen ordinarily by mortal eye, although He was still present among them in the Blessed Sacrament. But the Apostles and all the faithful had in our Blessed Lady a living and speaking image and picture of her Son, and it is impossible to imagine the extent to which they found in this a resource, a comfort, a joy, and a protection against all troubles and assaults.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST MIRACLE.

THESE beautiful beginnings of the Church in Jerusalem, when the Holy Ghost was reigning in the hearts of all the faithful, and producing fruits so wonderful of piety, devotion, obedience, poverty, and charity, are interesting to us on a twofold ground. In the first place, they are in themselves most instructive and encouraging, showing us how short a time is required for the attainment of very high sanctity, even in a large number of souls, when faith is strong and fresh, and when the Blessed Comforter finds simple and guileless hearts to work upon. In the second place—and this remark applies to the whole of the early history of the Church as it is set forth for us by St. Luke—it seems to have been providentially arranged that that history should be, as it were, typical of the whole future course of the life of the Church in the world, and should contain in itself all the elements of which that life, so varied and manifold in its permanent characteristics, was to be made up. If this is so, then, under the eyes and under the motherly guardianship of our Blessed Lady, the Church was made to pass through, at all events, some chief and typical phases and trials which the subsequent history was to exhibit in a constant

and varied repetition. The few words of St. Luke just now quoted sum up a good many of the characteristics of a perfect Christian community. In one respect, indeed, they go beyond anything that has been commonly reproduced even in the most flourishing Churches. For they mention the love of Evangelical poverty as prevailing to such an extent and degree that we find before us a picture of that community of goods and that perfect personal renunciation of property which, after that time, were ordinarily to be found only within the walls of religious houses or among the votaries of the eremitical life. As he proceeds in his story, St. Luke adds other features which we have called typical in the annals of the Church, and it is on these that we shall for a short time dwell, though not with that fulness of detail which belongs to her history as such.

The next incident in the story is what may be called the "beginning of miracles" in the new stage of the life of the Church after the Day of Pentecost, or rather of our Lord's Life in her and in His saints. The Day of Pentecost, indeed, was itself a day of wonders and miracles, but they were wonders rather corresponding to the marvels seen at the Baptism of our Lord or at the Transfiguration, than to what we commonly speak of as His miracles as such. The miracles, or signs, which our Lord worked during His lifetime, constituted the formal authentication of His claims as the Messias and of the doctrine which He preached. The argument was invincible, that the miracles showed that God was with Him, and that therefore what He said was the Word of God. And this argument was linked with the other,

which consisted in the fulfilment of the prophecies in His Person, the prophecies themselves including the prediction of His miracles. Thus when St. John sent his disciples to our Lord with the question whether He was the One Who was to come, our Lord bade the messengers go and tell John what they had seen and heard, referring to the miracles and to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor in the words of the prophecy of Isaias.[1] The same Divine method by which our Lord's Mission had been authenticated, was to be pursued as to the authentication of the mission of the Apostles and of the Church. They were to claim to be heard as messengers sent from God, and to prove the truth of their claim by the miracles and prophecies which showed that God was with them. The axiomatic principle which lay behind the argument was that God is truth, and therefore cannot authenticate a lie, but that the persons whom He authenticated in the manner stated, and the truths which they announced, were to be received and believed under pain of disobedience to God. The miracles were only mediately connected with the truths announced: they proved that the power of God was with men who preached certain truths, which were to be accepted because the men in question must have God with them. This formal method, essential for the formation of faith, was now to be solemnly adopted in the case of the Apostolical teaching.

The narrative of this "beginning of miracles" in the Church, and of the incidents to which it led, occupies what are to us the third and fourth chapters

[1] St. Matt. xi. 2—5.

of the Acts of the Apostles. St. Peter and St. John go up into the Temple at "the hour of prayer, the ninth hour," therefore at the time at which our Lord expired on the Cross. There the lame man from his mother's womb, who was placed every day at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, to collect alms, begged of them, and was miraculously healed by St. Peter in "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." The miracle of course attracted the attention of the crowd assembled in the Temple, and St. Peter took occasion at once to address to them the speech or sermon "in Solomon's Porch" which St. Luke reports for us. The Apostle disclaimed any power of his own in the working of the miracle. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, had glorified His Son Jesus, "Whom you indeed delivered up and denied before the face of Pilate, when he judged He should be released, but you denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted to you, but the Author of Life you killed, Whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." St. Peter gives no proof of the Resurrection but this—the witness of the Apostles, attested in turn by their miracles. He then proceeds to soften the impression which his severe words may have produced, by excusing the people and their rulers on the score of their ignorance. God in the meanwhile was fulfilling His own prophecies by their acts. He then calls on them to repent and be converted, that they may be saved. He tells them that our Lord is in Heaven, until the time of the "restitution of all things," and traces the prophecy concerning Him from the great

prediction of Moses, through Samuel and the rest, tells them that they are the children of the prophets, the heirs of the covenant, of the blessing promised to all the kindreds of the earth in the seed of Abraham, and that our Lord had been sent to them first of all to bless them by their conversion.

We need not go through the other incidents of this remarkable miracle and its sequel—the arrest of the Apostles, the assembly of the Sanhedrin to judge them, St. Peter's simple and courageous declaration of the truth, the inability of the judges to find any way of contradicting or explaining away the miracle, the injunction given to the Apostles not to speak or teach in the Name of our Lord, and the refusal of St. Peter to obey man rather than God. It is remarkable that the "fear" of which St. Luke has spoken a little before as coming on all, is instanced in the comparative timidity of the Jewish authorities, who end by dismissing the Apostles without punishment. Moreover, St. Luke seems to remind us that for the time the Sadducees were in power, and that their great objection to the Apostles was that "they taught the people, and preached in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." There was thus a division between the two great religious sects, who had united together for the purpose of bringing about our Lord's death. The Resurrection was not a doctrine to which the Pharisees could object on the same grounds as the Sadducees. Not less remarkable is the solemn and united prayer of the Church, assembled together on the return of the Apostles, asking of God to grant to His servants "that with all confidence they may speak Thy word,

stretching forth Thy hand to cures and signs and wonders, to be done in the Name of Thy holy Son, Jesus." After this prayer the place in which they were assembled was shaken, "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spoke the word with boldness."[2]

There was certainly one heart in the small Christian community—still small, although so very greatly multiplied in a short space of time—to which the incidents of which we have been speaking would convey a deeper meaning than to the rest. Mary could understand the perfect parallelism, with some differences and contrasts, between the beginning of the formal Apostolical preaching and its confirmation by miracles, and the points in the history of the Public Life of her Son, which are here almost reproduced. Our Lord was always appealing to His miracles as the proofs that He was from God, and that He spoke in the Name of God, and that what He said, whether in regard to His own office, Mission, and Person, or on any other point, was to be received as the Word of God. On His first visit to Jerusalem after His Baptism, it was by His miracles that He had gained the confidence of such men as Nicodemus. When, a year later, He revisited the same city, it was by a striking miracle, that at the Probatic Pool, that He challenged the attention of the Jewish authorities. And in the discussion to which this led, He rested His claim to their faith on His miracles and other similar evidences furnished by the Providence of His Father. He always claimed faith, and rested His claim on

[2] Acts iv. 31.

the proofs of which we speak. This had now been done in a most signal manner by the Apostles through their chief, and once again the people had been ready to accept the teaching of those who could produce evidences so unquestionable.

But more than this. The Apostles had been questioned by the authorities as their own Master had been questioned, and they had formally refused to obey the mandate given to them of not teaching any more in the Name of Jesus. Thus there had now come about a formal breach between the Church and the authorities of the Synagogue, and this was in itself an advance on anything that had happened in the course of our Lord's own teaching. His last words to the people had been to bid them obey the Scribes and Pharisees in what they told them to do, but not to imitate their works and their lives. But now the Apostles were in open antagonism to the Scribes and Pharisees. Although they had not broken with the worship in the Temple, in which, on the contrary, they were most diligent, they had begun an organization of their own entirely independent of the Temple, and of course it cannot be doubted that they exercised, and appointed others to exercise, the new and holy functions of the Christian priesthood. The Jewish rulers did not as yet venture on open persecution, but the antagonism which had been already proclaimed was one which could never be healed. It was certain to lead to an open persecution as soon as an opportunity was given to the rulers at Jerusalem for such a step. This therefore must be considered as the first chapter in the development of the Christian Church, and it was

apparently within a very short time of the Day of Pentecost itself.

The Church was now launched on a course which she was to continue to hold to the end of time. At the beginning, and as long as such evidences were required, she was to win the ear of the populations to which she addressed herself by the miracles of her preachers. But this sign was to continue always, even when she was no longer a stranger to the world, and had children of her own for many generations to teach and form in the ways of God. The gift was to abide in her as a mark of her sanctity, and as the privilege of those whom she was to count among her most valued sons. Her own great characteristics, as they became more and more known, her Unity, her Apostolicity, her identity all over the wide Empire which she was to create, and the sanctity of her sons, her manners, her children, with the Divine character of her history and progress, were to take the place of permanent supernatural marks more miraculous in themselves than the healing of the blind or the lame. Indeed, when the conversion of the world was once accomplished, against all the might of the Imperial Government, all the influence of paganism and its system of life, which fostered and consecrated the indulgence of passion, against all the arguments of philosophers and all the machinations of the evil spirits, that conversion alone became a standing and most stupendous miracle, the force of which can never become obsolete. By her evidences, then, the Church was to be known, as she is known to the present day, to all who have eyes to see, and, by

a special Providence of God, it was to be equally evident to all such that, of the scores of heretical or schismatical bodies which were to break off from her, none should be able even to claim these her distinctive and divine prerogatives. Thus, being known for what she is, she claims the faith and allegiance of all, and teaches the law and truths which have been intrusted to her, which rest, in the first instance, on her word as the Messenger of God. The heart of Mary must indeed have rejoiced at seeing the Church take up her appointed work, and accredit her claims in the appointed way. But that she had done so, must necessarily have involved enormous responsibilities on the part of those to whom she was to speak, and if the prayer of Mary rose for the teachers and preachers of the faith, it must also have been poured forth with tender anxiety for the world to whom they were to deliver the message of God.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST JUDGMENT.

THE history of St. Luke next passes on to another incident of very great importance, which shows the development of one of the most precious teachings of our Lord, as also the exercise of that authority in the rulers of the Church, of which He had laid the foundations in His own doctrine. Nothing is more beautiful in this early beginning of the life of the Christian community than the manner in which one point after another of our Lord's example and teaching comes instinctively into prominence, as the rich soil in spring teems with shoots of the seeds which have been confided to it a few months before. But the spring of the Church was not that uncertain fitful period to which we are accustomed in our own northern climates, when after the beginnings of the new birth of nature, so to say, there are checks and reverses in its onward growth, when winter seems to regain the ground which it has lost, or at least to dispute any further advance of the genial renovation. The springtide of the Church was one glorious outburst which began almost immediately on the Ascension of our Lord, and continued without break, becoming daily ever more complete and magnificent

in its beauty and rich fertility. This does not mean that there were no intervals between the successive stages of the advance which St. Luke chronicles for us without any mention of such intervals. A close study of the Acts shows us that he sometimes passes over months, or even years, without giving us a hint of his method. We may, however, rely on him for omitting no prominent historical feature of the growth of the Church, and in this sense we can trace one stage of that growth after another as a gradual and ceaseless advance. The secret of these marvellous developments in this early stage of the life of the Church was undoubtedly the action of the Holy Ghost, but it was that action working in the way of which our Lord Himself had spoken when He said, "He shall bring to your minds all things whatsoever I have said to you." The seed which had been cast into the soil during the life and by the example and teaching of our Lord was now shooting up with a marvellous impetuosity under the fostering influences of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord, it must be remembered, had led a life of extreme poverty, in the sense of all absence of property, in the Holy House of Nazareth during the lifetime of St. Joseph, and afterwards. He had led a kind of community life, as we term it, with His Apostles, and the holy community into which they at once and by instinct formed the disciples after His Ascension, was but a continuation of that earliest community of which He had been the chief. He had taught not the Apostles only, but all the faithful, and especially those who were the nearest and the most privileged among them, the blessings of poverty

of spirit, making it the first among the Beatitudes, and even of the actual state of poverty, when He said afterwards, "Blessed ye poor." He had taught them not to lay up treasures on earth, but in Heaven, that where their treasure was there also their hearts might be. He bade them be without all solicitude even for what are considered the necessaries of life, such as food and raiment, telling them to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, which are clothed and fed by the Providence of the Father. Their Father in Heaven knew that they had need of all these things. He had said, "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a Kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. Make to yourselves bags which grow not old, a treasure in Heaven which faileth not, where no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth."

These words of our Lord have been caught up by chosen hearts in all ages of the Church, and on them has been built up the heroic sanctity of thousands of His most devoted followers. But it is not natural to think that those who had heard them, or lived with others who had heard them, while still the fragrance and power of His presence and the enthralling sweetness of His example and doctrine were as yet fresh in the air all around them, would have been less ready to catch the saintly infection than others who had only heard of Him after long years had passed since He had left earth for Heaven. Thus it is only what we might expect that from the very first we should see, in this early Church of Jerusalem, not simply an intense brotherly charity in the relief of the necessities of those who were poorer than others,

but a very great and overpowering love for poverty, for its own sake, in the sense in which poverty means the having nothing that can be called our own, the dependence on the Providence of the Father for daily bread, in the plainest sense of the petition, freedom from all care and solicitude, as the door which opens to men the inheritance of the choicest blessings of the Gospel Kingdom. This is the true account to be given of the community of goods, of which St. Luke has already told us. It was not a movement of charity, the rich giving up what they possessed for the sake of helping others, but a love of the precept or counsel which our Lord had on His lips when He said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come follow Me."

It is necessary to have these truths in our mind to understand fully the history which St. Luke now proceeds to give us in two contrasted pictures, as it were, which represent to us the two classes which must always find their exemplification in any large community in which apostolical principles of life are introduced. "The multitude of the believers had but one heart and one soul, neither did any one say that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them. And with great power did the Apostles give testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. And great fear was in them all. But neither was there any one among them that wanted. For as many as were owners of houses or lands sold them, and brought the price of the things which they sold and laid it down before the feet of the Apostles, and distribution

was made to every man according as he had need."[1] This is the general description, and it implies a considerable amount of organization and arrangement. It was not merely to the poor among the brethren that the distribution was made, but to all those who had made themselves poor by the surrender of their property, as well as those who had no property to surrender. St. Luke then proceeds to the two particular cases of which it is his purpose to speak. "And Joseph who, by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is by interpretation the son of consolation, a Levite, a Cyprian born, having land, sold it and brought the price and laid it at the feet of the Apostles. But a certain man named Ananias, and Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of land, and by fraud kept back a part of the price of the land, his wife being privy thereto, and bringing a certain part of it laid it at the feet of the Apostles."[2]

It is clearly the object of St. Luke to draw for us the contrast between the givers of these two sums of money to the common fund over which the Apostles, as representing our Lord, had to preside. It was not simply an eleemosynary fund. Jerusalem contained many poor we cannot doubt, but probably few who were actually paupers. The indigent among the faithful may have been such as are always to be found, such as God promises shall never cease from among us, those who through age or infirmity, or sickness, or bereavement, are left destitute, except of such aid as they receive from the charity of their brethren. Paupers, in the sense of persons able to work and willing to maintain themselves thereby,

[1] Acts iv. 32—35. [2] Acts iv. 36; v. 2.

but unable from the overcrowded state of the population generally to obtain a livelihood, did not exist there in any large numbers. There were also abundant supplies of money sent for charitable purposes from the Jews all over the Empire, which money was probably placed in the hands of the Chief Priests to distribute, and the exclusion of the Christians from this source of support must have been felt very severely in the later years of the Church of Jerusalem. Thus we find the contribution to the support of the poor Christians of Palestine and Jerusalem, a constant pre-occupation of St. Paul and St. Barnabas. But the fund to which both Barnabas on the one hand, and Ananias and Sapphira on the other, contributed, had other objects. It was the common fund from which, as in religious orders at the present day, each member of the community received his support, in order that all might practise the poverty of the Gospel and of the Beatitudes. The gift was a solemn formal surrender of what they had to the Christian community as such, and it entitled them for the future to the benefits enjoyed by the members of that community. Their act was a gift of themselves to God, to be supported by His Providence rather than by their own possessions. It was an act obligatory on none, but an act fraught with immense blessings when made in sincerity and truth.

We may see the reward of this sincerity and faithfulness and truth, in the subsequent career of St. Barnabas. He had given largely and liberally to God, and God in return dealt with him largely and liberally. There is no more engaging character

in all the collection of beautiful and generous souls who are drawn for us in the Acts than this of St. Barnabas. He lived for long years as an Apostle, and at last laid down his life as a martyr in his own country of Cyprus, into which, as companion of St. Paul, he had been the first to introduce the Gospel. It was Barnabas who brought St. Paul himself to the Apostles, and his name occurs frequently in the sacred history. We hear of him first on this occasion, and his act seems to have had something of unusual splendour and generosity about it, from the manner in which it is mentioned by St. Luke. It is fair to think that it was the outset and the foundation of his long career of the highest sanctity. God loves a cheerful and generous giver, and he may well be supposed to have advanced by great strides on the path of perfection, the graces which were bestowed upon him as a first reward being very great and continually multiplied by his own faithful cooperation.

The mention of St. Barnabas on this occasion by St. Luke may be considered as pointing him out as an instance of the faithfulness of our Lord to the promise which He had made to all those who should give up houses and lands and possessions for His sake and the Gospel's, a name very conspicuous in the history of the Church and familiar to all the generation for whom St. Luke wrote as well to their posterity being selected for this purpose. For it cannot be supposed that there were not many more names which might have been specially mentioned in the same way, if such had been the purpose of the sacred historian. And then St. Luke immediately

subjoins the story of Ananias and his wife, as if for the express purpose of marking the contrast both in the acts of Barnabas on the one hand and of Ananias and Sapphira on the other, and also in the manner in which their cases were dealt with by God in this early stage of the Church's history.

Ananias and his wife are said to have sold a piece of land, and by fraud to have kept back a part of the price, laying the rest at the feet of the Apostles as if it had been the whole. The fraud was committed by Ananias with the privity of his wife, and the actual offering at the feet of the Apostles was made by the husband. It was a fraud only in the sense in which we have spoken of it. They were perfectly free not to sell their land, and they were perfectly free, having sold it, to do what they chose with the price. But it was a deception on the community to which it was offered, to state and let it be understood that the money offered was the whole of the price, while it was in truth only a part, because the act of surrender under such a false statement gave them the right to live at the expense of the community as if they had made over their whole property to it, while at the same time they retained a part for their own use. Their act was precisely that of a person who professes religious poverty in the cloister, and makes over his whole property to the community, only retaining secretly a portion for his own private use. The very object of such surrenders in the Church of Jerusalem was the desire to be free from all property and its cares, and to depend entirely on the good Providence of the Father.

The fraud of Ananias and Sapphira was revealed interiorly to St. Peter, who was also inspired to expose it publicly for the warning of the community at large, in order that it might pass into the annals of the Church and be handed on for ever, that this kind of deception, in a sacred matter, was one of those offences which God would punish even in this world, and, if it were not repented of, in the next world also. "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldest lie unto the Holy Ghost, and by fraud keep back part of the price of the land? When it remained, did it not remain unto thee? And after it was sold, was it not in thy power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God."[3] St. Peter speaks of the sin of Ananias as a lie against the Holy Ghost, in the first place because the Holy Ghost had inspired the thought of surrendering the property to the Church, as He is the author of all good counsels, and in an especial manner of those counsels which belong to the practice of that which is most perfect. This good counsel Ananias had been prompted to follow in its integrity, but he had been unfaithful in the accomplishment of his purpose, and yet had let others think that he was following it out perfectly. Thus he made the Holy Ghost, in a certain sense, the author of a deception. Again, he had lied to the Holy Ghost, "not to men, but to God," as St. Peter said, because the Holy Ghost dwelt in the Church, and the lie was told to the Church, a circumstantial lie, embodied in the act by

3 Acts v. 3—14.

which the false offering was made at the feet of the Apostles.

Our Lord had said that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was a sin which should not be forgiven either in this world or in the next, meaning, as we see reason to believe, that it was a sin which, in the government of God over the world, should not be punished in the next world only, but should also have its signal chastisement in this. And when our Lord speaks of the forgiveness of sins, He seems always to include in the phrase both the stages of forgiveness, that by which the eternal guilt is pardoned on repentance, and that also by which the temporal punishment is remitted. For these two kinds of forgiveness do not as a matter of fact always go together. Thus when He said to St. Mary Magdalene, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," He may well have meant that the pain due to her sins, already cancelled as to their guilt by her contrition, was remitted to her, for the sake of the singular and heroic love which she had shown to Him in the house of the Pharisee. And the words about the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost imply that the sins which assail the Holy Ghost, in His office of the Comforter and Guide of the Church, are to be stigmatized and punished both in this world in the sight of men, and in the next world also, unless they are cancelled by due penitence. This sin of Ananias and Sapphira was a sin of this kind. It assailed directly the Holy Ghost in His office in the Church, because He it was Who had guided the hearts of the faithful to this devotion of surrendering their possessions to the Christian community, and it was a profanation of

one of His holy institutions, when the sacred state of poverty which was practised by so many was stained by a lie of the kind of which we are speaking.

The execution of the punishment followed immediately on the denunciation of the sin by St. Peter. It was the act of God, and the part of St. Peter in the matter was the denunciation of the sin and not the infliction of the punishment. The punishment would have followed in the Providence of God, whether St. Peter had spoken or not, unless perhaps Ananias might have been already penitent and confessed his fault humbly, as was the case afterwards in a somewhat similar sin on the part of Simon Magus. In this case the denunciation of the sin by St. Peter was merciful to Ananias, as well as an act of charitable warning to others who might perhaps be tempted to the same kind of deception. For Ananias had an opportunity of confession, and even though he did not make an open confession, he may have had the grace of interior contrition. But it was clearly the will of God that there should be no doubt left in the minds of the faithful as to the enormity of the crime, and as to the direct and swift punishment with which it was to be followed. The unholy thing, so to say, of falsehood in the practice of that sacred poverty which had now sprung into existence in the infant Church, was to be rooted out at once, and branded with a mark of infamy by the action of God Himself, which was to be handed on to all generations. It is in this way that we must account for the sequel of the history of the death of Ananias, which was immediately followed by the similar punishment of his wife.

"And there came great fear on all that heard it. And the young men rising up removed him, and carrying him out, buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in."[4] She entered the place in which the faithful were accustomed to assemble, or some place where the Apostles were usually to be found for matters relating to the community. She too was doomed by the judgment of God, and this was revealed to St. Peter, who gave her, as he had given to Ananias, an opportunity of confessing her sin. "And Peter said to her, Tell me, woman, whether you sold the land for so much," that is, for the sum which they had alleged, and which they had paid in to the common fund, laying it at the feet of the Apostles. "And she said, Yea, for so much. And Peter said to her, Why have you agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them who have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. Immediately she fell down before his face, and gave up the ghost. And the young men coming in, found her dead, and carried her out, and buried her by her husband. And there came great fear upon the whole Church, and upon all that heard these things."[5]

This was undoubtedly a most signal manifestation of the manner in which God punishes sins against the Church. This sin belonged to that class, which, as has been said, fall under the general head of sins, directly or indirectly, against the Holy Ghost. It was, we may suppose, the first of its

4 Acts v. 5—7. 5 Acts v. 8—11.

class, and its marvellous punishment may have prevented its committal in numberless other cases. In this respect it reminds us of the sin of Achan,[6] which was so severely punished at the very beginning of the conquest of the Holy Land by the Israelites. God has ordinarily two measures and times of punishment, in this world and in the next. He does not ordinarily punish all sins in this world, which would indeed be a scene of perpetual chastisements if such were the case. He ordinarily waits for the next world, and thus gives men time to repent. This is the feature in His government of which we often hear complaints, as when the Psalmist declares that he cannot understand the prosperity of the wicked. But there are some sins which must be chastised here, even though they are repented of, for the sake of example and warning. Such are the sins of nations, which will have no corporate existence beyond the grave. Such are sins against the Church and the Holy See. In such cases some signal punishment is often inflicted, or, again, the great and more prominent sinners are publicly chastised, although others are afterwards allowed to escape. In many instances the punishment satisfies the vindictive justice of God, if the sin be repented of. It is like the public execution of a murderer, which, in many cases, and in the majority of cases in a good Catholic population, secures the salvation of his soul by the many prayers by which the criminal is helped, and the care taken to prepare him for death. The sin of David, though forgiven, was punished in like manner, as also that of Oza,

[6] Josue vii.

who touched the Ark, and probably that of the disobedient Prophet sent to denounce the false worship at Samaria, who was slain by the lion on his return home.[7] Such may have been the case with Ananias and Sapphira, if they had the grace to form an act of contrition at the moment of their death. The chastisement was for the sake of the Church, and is the first instance of a long series of similar judgments of God by which her history is illustrated and her children filled with holy fear.

Let us now for a moment turn from the direct history of which we have been speaking, to consider it in relation to the mind and heart of the Blessed Mother, who must have been most intimately acquainted with all the movers in the scene, and made them all the objects of her most tender care. The beautiful instinct of poverty and entire dependence on the Providence of the Father, had been a great principle throughout the whole life of our Blessed Lady. Especially when our Lord came forth into the world at Bethlehem, she must have caught most fully the lesson conveyed in the circumstances with which He chose to surround His first entrance into His Kingdom, and the high place therein which He at once assigned to the poverty which was to become the fruitful parent of so much perfection, so much joy, so many glorious works and holy institutions. All His Life afterwards was a perpetual practice of poverty, and when He had gathered close to Himself the group of His chosen Apostles and disciples, He began at once to train them in the exercises of the community life in which

7 2 Kings xii. 12; vi. 6; 3 Kings xiii. 24.

no one had a purse of his own. It must have been an intense joy to Mary to see this holy way of life adopted on so large a scale in the early Church of Jerusalem.

One of Mary's chief sorrows, a grief learnt from the Sacred Heart Itself, had been the fall of Judas. She had seen there the danger of the growth of a secret covetousness and love of property in one of the holy body around our Lord. The lesson had not been lost on her of the peril which must arise among numbers of persons bound in this way to an Evangelical rule of life, as soon as fervour relaxed and self-love began to reassert its claims. It is not at all improbable that the evil end of Judas had had a share in urging the disciples on to a great hatred of money, and a great desire to be free from the allurements and the cares which it brings with it. Thus she must have been intensely grieved at the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. She would grieve and mourn over their fall, and would pray earnestly that they might find mercy, the chastisements inflicted on them being accepted by God as the satisfaction for their sin. But over the judgment itself, which had filled the whole community with fear, she could not but rejoice, inasmuch as it was an exercise of God's justice, and, at the same time, of His vigilant care in rooting out evil seeds from His Church. Henceforth there was this special brand on the sin of covetousness and dishonesty in persons who make profession of a life of holy poverty, and thus any one who might be tempted to the sin of Ananias would have a double safeguard to secure him. If he did not conquer the temptation out of

love for God and his holy estate, he would at all events tremble at the swift punishment which might fall on him almost before he could enjoy or profit by his dishonesty.

Again, it cannot be doubted that this judgment of God placed the Church as a community in a new light. It was now declared solemnly by an act of God's Providence, that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the Church, not only for the purpose of guiding her into all truth and filling her with the powers of the world to come, but also to defend her against internal treasons by the quick and signal punishment of offences against her constitution. No one could understand this better than our Blessed Lady, and she could see in this first exertion of judicial power in her behalf by the Holy Ghost, the promise of a continual series, reaching unto the end of the world, of judgments on rebellious children as well as on open assailants from without, on the authors of heresies and schisms, on the depravers of the holy traditions of Christian life, on the corrupters and violators of religious rules. The Church was not to be armed with the weapons of the secular power. But she was to have within her One Who would not let her sacred rights and holy customs be set at naught with impunity. We shall see other instances of this in the course of this history. Our Lord had not used, in His own Life and for the protection of His own Person, any such powers. Herod, indeed, had been made a signal example to a long line of followers in the miserable crime of the persecutor. Our Lord blasted the fig-tree by His word, but that was only a parable of the chastise-

ment of the unfruitful synagogue. But He had spoken plainly of the judicial power in the Church, of the danger of not hearing her, and of the severe punishment of those who were to reject her. The judgment which had now fallen on Ananias and Sapphira might naturally have been expected by those who understood her dignity, and as no one understood better than our Blessed Lady what that dignity was, and how inexpressibly dear she was to the Sacred Heart, it must have been an occasion to her of reverent thanksgiving to God that His jealous care of her had thus been signally manifested.

CHAPTER VI.

THE APOSTLES AND THE RULERS.

After the signal judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, it is natural to find that the sacred historian dwells for a time on the majesty and power with which the Church seemed to be clothed, in the eyes of the faithful and of the people outside. "There came great fear upon the whole Church, and upon all that heard these things." Then he speaks of the frequency and greatness of the miracles of this time. "By the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." Next, as it seems, he speaks of their having so far established themselves as the rulers of a great body, as to have a particular place in the Temple for their assemblies and teaching. "And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch, and of the rest no man durst join himself to them, but the people magnified them." It would seem that by this is meant that the Apostles were tacitly left in possession of the place spoken of when they wished to teach the people, no one of the ordinary doctors interfering with them. The passage seems to imply that there was a kind of heavenly dignity and majesty about the Twelve, which impressed itself even on those outside. The historian then adds the great increase

of the numbers of the faithful. "And the multitude of men and women that believed in the Lord was much increased, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that when Peter came, his shadow at the least might overshadow any of them, and they might be delivered from their infirmities." The movement spread beyond Jerusalem itself. "And there came also together to Jerusalem a multitude out of the neighbouring cities, bringing sick persons, and such as were troubled with unclean spirits, who were all healed." Thus Jerusalem became permanently what so many of the towns and cities of Galilee and Judæa had been for a time in the days of our Lord's own preaching. The streets were crowded with sick and infirm persons brought to be healed, and were continually resounding with the joyful cries of wonder and thanksgiving as one marvellous cure followed another.

The happy onward progress of the Church seemed to be assured, and, if she had had only the people to deal with, her speedy triumph might have been reckoned upon. But she had two classes of enemies leagued against her. The Chief Priests and Scribes, a large portion of the dominant class in the nation, were as hostile, on personal and on political grounds, to the Apostles, as they had been to our Lord Himself. Probably there had been a great revulsion of feeling against them on account of the enormous crime which they had accomplished in the Crucifixion. Thus we can trace in many of their acts at this time a timidity and want of resolution which were altogether lacking in Caiphas and

his associates when they were dealing with our Lord. The High Priesthood does not seem to have passed from the Sadducees, but it certainly seems to have been the case that they were struck with a kind of panic when the Church came forth from the Cenacle. The Passion and Resurrection had strengthened the courage of such men as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who may represent to us a large body among the rulers themselves. But the rapid and conspicuous growth of the Church drove others to a kind of desperation, all the more as we can notice in the demeanour and language of St. Peter and the Apostles at this time a great boldness in denouncing the crime of which the Chief Priests had been guilty, although at the same time they spoke of it in charity and allowed it the excuse of ignorance. And behind the Chief Priests and their partisans were the legions of evil spirits, raging with anger at their great defeat at the very time of what had seemed to them their greatest triumph, when they brought about the Passion of our Lord. These were the second line, so to speak, of the enemies of the Church, guiding and inciting the malice of the priests with an intensity of hostility far greater than could burn in any human heart. Their fury never slept, and was reined in only by the Providence of God, allowing His Church to be tried, but only in the way and degree which He chose to permit.

The vigilant heart of the Blessed Mother, whose prayers and example animated the Apostles in their zealous work for souls, may well have foreseen that the bright days of success would soon be interrupted by a storm. She had seen, in the Life of our Lord,

how fertile in evil resources was the malice of Hell against Him, how ready were His earthly enemies to find, in all that He did and said, a pretext for the indulgence of the hatred which jealousy of His power with the people had aroused in their hearts. Now, the motive which urged the enemies of the Church to action seems to have been mainly the very great prominence and influence obtained by the Apostles. "Then the High Priest rose up and all those that were with him, which is the heresy of the Sadducees, and were filled with indignation. And they laid hands on the Apostles, and put them in the common prison. But an Angel of the Lord by night opening the doors of the prison, and leading them out, said, Go, and standing speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life." "And they having heard this, early in the morning entered into the Temple and taught." This went on for an hour or so, perhaps, before the meeting of the Sanhedrin. "And the High Priest came, and they that were with him, and called together the Council, and all the ancients of the children of Israel, and they sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and having opened the prison, found them not there, they returned and told, saying, the prison indeed we found shut with all diligence, and the keepers standing before the doors, but opening it we found no man therein."

"Now when the magistrates of the Temple and the Chief Priests heard these words, they were in doubt concerning them, what would come to pass. But one came and told them, Behold the men whom

you put in prison, are standing in the Temple and teaching the people. Then went the magistrates with the officers, and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the Council."

That the Apostles had been delivered miraculously was taken for granted. We hear of no inquiry, of no thought of punishing the guards for negligence. The miracle was not mentioned, but it must have had an effect of its own, not only in encouraging the Apostles themselves, but also in breaking down the daring of the enemies who had seized them, and in strengthening the hearts of those in the assembly who were inclined to take their part, as well as in determining many waverers to join themselves to these last. It could not be denied that God had undertaken the protection of the Apostles, who were now to answer to any charges which could be brought against them, and which amounted to nothing more than that they had continued to preach in the name of our Lord after the prohibition already laid on them after the first miracle.

"And the High Priest asked them, saying, Commanding we commanded you that you should not teach in this Name, and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" or teaching, "and you have a mind to bring the Blood of this Man upon us." The words of the Chief Priest, Caiphas, as it appears, testify to the zeal and success of the Apostles. They had made all Jerusalem ring with the name of our Lord. Caiphas avoids all mention

of the Divine evidences by which the testimony of the Apostles had been accredited, the marvellous and countless miracles wrought in the name of our Lord. All these evidences fell on men like him without the slightest effect, save that he may at times have quailed at heart at the supernatural power in the presence of which he felt himself to be struggling without avail. He does not mention the Holy Name itself. "You have a mind to bring the Blood of this Man upon us." He had been one of those, perhaps, who had led the whole people in their terrible cry, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children." And here there is in his words something like that former unconscious prophecy, when he had said that it was expedient that one should die for the nation. For the Apostles did indeed desire to bring the Blood of our Lord upon them, not in the way of revenge and chastisement, but in the way of mercy and salvation, and especially also in the way of their personal deliverance from the Divine punishment which, within a few years from that time, was to fall on the city and the whole nation for that very crime of having shed the Blood of our Lord.

"But Peter and the Apostles answering said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers hath raised up Jesus, Whom you put to death, hanging Him upon a tree"—using the Scriptural expression for crucifixion. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." The words seem to bear witness to the Kingly character which our Lord claimed before

Pilate, which was the most efficacious of the charges which Caiphas and his associates had urged before the Governor, and which the latter had insisted upon retaining when he had placed it on the Title of the Cross. The priests, on the other hand, had declared that they had no King but Cæsar. "And we are witnesses of these things," that is, of the doctrine of the Resurrection and the other truths concerning our Lord which St. Peter had mentioned. But not we only, "And the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to all that obey Him." For the Holy Ghost, even in His interior and invisible working in the souls of the faithful, is always a witness to our Lord, as our Lord Himself had said in the discourse after the Last Supper, because He produces by His fruits the wonderful and heavenly Christian character, in all its beauty and perfection, and especially in its resemblance to the character of our Lord and in its faithfulness to His teaching. But besides the internal witness of the Holy Ghost, He at that time and for long years after, as long as it was the Providence of God that so it should be, witnessed to our Lord and to the truth of His Resurrection by the many marvellous gifts, which were ordinarily bestowed on those who believed, and which were manifest to all.

The simple words of the Apostles, spoken, we cannot doubt, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, according to our Lord's promise, had a marvellous power and efficacy, and their enemies were not able to gainsay or resist them. "They were cut to the heart when they heard these words." But their hearts were not moved or softened, for there

was in them a determination not to yield to the influence of grace. At least, we may suppose, such was the case with the dominant party, the Chief Priest and those about him, whom St. Luke speaks of. These, if they were not the more numerous section of the assembly, were the most powerful on account of their possession of the chief offices. The Sadducees were for the time thus dominant, while the more respected and honourable part of the Council seems to have been composed of Pharisees. A great number of them had joined the others in the great league against our Lord. But after the Resurrection, which involved the doctrine as to which the Sadducees were heretical and the Pharisees orthodox, the union between the two parties became more lax. We find this fact meeting us, every now and then, in the history of the Acts. And, almost at the very end of that history, we find St. Paul dividing the Council most efficaciously by his declaration that it was the doctrine of the Resurrection for which he was called in question. However, on the present occasion, St. Luke tells us that they "thought to put them to death," words which imply that such a sentence was actually proposed, or that its proposal was intended.

The Providence of God has a great number of various ways which He uses in carrying out His designs by the instrumentality of men, and He uses His enemies as well as His friends for His own most wise purposes. One of these ways is that of casting division into the counsels of the opponents of the Church or of the persecutors of the saints,

by means of which the plans formed against Him in them are constantly defeated. As the history of the early Church, related in the Acts, was to be a kind of epitome of the working of various forces and elements which were to be continually active all through her life upon earth, it was well that there should be, in that early history, some instances of deliverance by means of this method of Providential rule. The Apostles had already been miraculously delivered from their prison, and it would have cost God no more to deliver them now by some intervention of His power. The life of the whole Church was wrapped up in the safety of the Apostles, and no doubt the prayers of the Blessed Mother and of all the faithful were poured forth on this occasion with as much fervour and intensity as when, at a later time, Herod had slain St. James the Great and had put Peter in prison, intending his execution. This time no Angel was sent, but the heart of one of the most influential and honourable of the Council, a man who was the head of the large party of the Pharisees, was moved to remonstrate against the intention of murdering the Apostles, and to suggest a policy of toleration, which was adopted at his suggestion.

The name of Gamaliel is dear to Christians, from the simple fact that he was the teacher of St. Paul, and probably of St. Stephen also. He becomes still dearer when we know that his name is inscribed in the list of the saints of the Church, honoured in her Martyrology. He was a very famous man indeed in his own day, and his name lives in the Rabbinical books, in which it is said that the

glory of the Synagogue died with him. Moreover he is said to have been the son of the famous Simeon, who took our Lord in his arms when He was brought to the Temple by our Lady at her Purification. Yet he seems to have held back from the acknowledgment of our Lord, and at the time of which we are speaking he may not yet have been a Christian, although his language is not altogether inconsistent with that hypothesis. But we must understand that at this time, notwithstanding all the miracles of the Apostles, there must have been a very large number indeed among the most virtuous and learned of the Jews at Jerusalem who were more than half converted to the faith, but who had not as yet the courage to make of it an open profession. It seems likely from the subsequent history of the Acts, and from hints in the Epistles, that this class of men continued to exist in some numbers at Jerusalem to a much later date than we are usually inclined to suppose. Just so at the present day, there are so many good Protestants very near the truth, who yet hold back from submission to the Catholic Church. Gamaliel was a Pharisee, and apparently, as has been said, an acknowledged leader of the party, and therefore interference from him on the side of toleration was likely to receive large support among its other members.

"But one in the Council rising up, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a Doctor of the Law, respected by all the people, commanded the men to be put forth a little while. And he said to them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do as touching these men. For before these

days rose up Theudas, assuming himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves, and he was slain, and all that believed him were scattered and brought to nothing. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the enrolling, and drew away the people after him. He also perished, and all, even as many as consented to him, were dispersed. And now therefore I say to you, refrain from these men and let them alone. For if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to naught. But if it be of God you cannot overthrow it, lest perhaps you should be found to fight even against God. And they consented unto him."

The first-named of the two adventurers mentioned in this speech of Gamaliel is not easily identified with any particular person mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus. But we know that there were many insurrections in the time of the first Herod, and the number of the adherents of this Theudas is not so large as to make it difficult to suppose that he may have been one of the number, and that his particular insurrection has escaped special notice. It is not so with Judas of Galilee, whose name belongs to history, and who headed a rather formidable movement at the time named in the speech. Judas represented a principle that might easily attract followers among a fanatical people, for he taught that it was unlawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or any foreign master, and this principle was still matter of discussion in the time of our Lord's last teaching in the Temple. The policy recommended by Gamaliel implies that there

was no danger to social order, no rebellion against constituted authority, no obviously false or immoral doctrine, which could be imputed to the Apostles. It implies also, as has been said, that the mind of the speaker was in doubt as to the character of the movement before him, and that he was open to conviction, if he did not actually as yet believe that the movement came from God. This was certainly a great advance on anything that had as yet been publicly avowed in the councils of the Jews, and the avowal, made by a man so distinguished as Gamaliel, must have occasioned a great stir. On the other hand, it was not an avowal of belief in the Christian creed, and so it might conciliate a number of adherents who were not prepared to go so far as Gamaliel himself in their estimate of the disciples and teaching of our Lord. In this sense it was a highly prudent and skilful proposal, which covered all that was desired by the followers of the Apostles, who had no wish to quarrel openly with the authorities of the holy nation. It proposed to leave the decision of the question as to the claims of the Church to God.

It may be added, that this counsel of Gamaliel was certainly founded on the great texts and passages in the Old Testament, in which the case of possibly false prophets and teachers was contemplated, and in which directions were given how such persons were to be detected.[1] The doctrine may be reduced briefly to two heads. If the prophet taught anything like apostacy from the God of Israel, the falsehood of his claims was at once

[1] See Deut. xiii. and xviii.; Jeremias xiv. and xxviii.

made plain, and he was to be dealt with accordingly. In case this test failed, the issue of his prophecies, that is, their coming to naught and failing of fulfilment, was the second infallible proof of the falsehood of his teaching. If we suppose Gamaliel to have applied these two tests to the teaching of the Apostles, it is clear that he could not have formed a judgment against them on the first ground. The Apostles claimed that what they taught was the fulfilment of the promises made by God to His people, and we have seen how careful St. Peter was to urge in his speeches the agreement of the prophecies with the truths concerning our Lord's Life and Passion. A person in the place of Gamaliel would therefore fall back on the other test, and his advice to the Council is nothing else but a recommendation that they should wait and see what came of the new teaching. In this he may have been perfectly sincere, and by the application of this test he and others like him would in the end have been led to the Church. Probably the great difficulty in his mind, as in that of others, was what St. Paul calls the stumbling-block of the Passion, for this was the part of the prophetic picture of the Messias which was least intelligible even to the learned Jews, when there was in their mind any admixture of pride or self-righteousness. Thus Gamaliel may have been on the way to the Church, approaching her unconsciously as he learnt more of her true character and teaching, though even the miracles of the Apostles may have as yet failed to convince him, on account of the existence in his mind of some principle or prejudice or intellectual

misconception as to the meaning of the prophecies with which he was so familiar. The case is as common as possible among learned and good persons outside the Church in the present day, men of upright and virtuous lives, but who still lack the grace which is required for conversion, on account not so much of an evil will as of a partially clouded intelligence.

"And they consented to him. And calling the Apostles, after they had scourged them, they charged them that they should not speak at all in the Name of Jesus, and they dismissed them." The counsel of Gamaliel was that they should leave the Apostles alone, on the ground that their doctrine and teaching might turn out to be from God. It was an unreasonable manner of acting on such a suggestion, to scourge the preachers of the doctrine in question. Probably the dominant party could not be persuaded so far to forego all the revenge which they had meditated, and they might have said that the authorities would seem to confess themselves in the wrong, if no punishment at all were inflicted on the Apostles. The scourging which was thus unjustly inflicted was not of the same barbarous severity with that which our Blessed Lord had suffered in the Prætorium of Pilate. In that case the executioners of the sentence were the Roman soldiers, and the scourging itself was of a far more painful and shameful kind. The Jewish punishment was the forty stripes save one which were enjoined in the Law, and the instruments used were probably simple rods. It was nevertheless a punishment which involved a considerable amount of pain, and which was very degrading to persons

who were venerated as messengers of God, as well as workers of miracles.

This, however, only made the suffering more precious in the eyes of the Apostles. For they had been allowed now, for the first time, to share a little of the pain which our Blessed Lord had undergone in the Passion, and more than a little of the shame. And this, to the true servants and lovers of the Crucified, is the most precious thing that God's Providence can bring on them. For, as St. Francis said in the well-known anecdote in the *Fioretti*, in all other things we do what is required of us, but in suffering for the sake of our Lord we give Him something of our own, and therefore such occasions are the causes of the purest and highest joy. This is exactly the sentiment which this scourging produced in the hearts of St. Peter and his companions. "And they indeed went from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus." It was not the pain, but the shame which they delighted in. It was to them the highest of honours that could have been bestowed upon them. And no doubt this was the common feeling throughout the whole Christian body as to what had taken place. Instead of degrading their teachers and rulers in their eyes, the shame which they had had to undergo raised them in their estimation, and gave them a new character. They were henceforth crowned with a kind of glory which had not before belonged to them.

But the practical issue of this attempt at persecution was the victory of the Apostles and the dis-

comfiture of the Chief Priests. The injunction not to teach at all in the Name of our Lord remained a dead letter, and no further attempt was made to enforce it. "And every day they ceased not in the Temple, and from house to house, to teach and to preach Christ Jesus," that is, the doctrine that Jesus their Master was the Christ. The teaching in the Temple may be especially mentioned, because its continuance shows that they acted with the full consciousness of the authorities, who nevertheless made no efforts to hinder their teaching. The teaching from house to house points to a more private and intimate method of instruction, and it must have been far more frequent than the other. It was a long time before the Christians could have their own places of assembly for worship on any large scale, and without such places it would not have been possible for the preaching of the Gospel, in the modern sense, to be practised to large audiences. The offering of the Holy Sacrifice must also have been frequent, and this also could not probably have taken place except in private houses. We may suppose that the miracles, of which St. Luke speaks just before this narrative, continued, and that thus there was continual increase in the evidences by which God confirmed the words of His preachers. Under such circumstances the Church grew and prospered for awhile, and the next incident which is presented to us in the sacred history is an occurrence internal to the Church itself, although it led accidentally, as we should say, to a further and far more violent outbreak of the spirit of persecution.

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE SEVEN DEACONS.

THE beautiful springtide of the Church, as its chief incidents are related to us by St. Luke, was not, as we have seen, to be one unbroken advance in peaceful growth and in the unfolding, one after another, of the rich elements of life and fertility with which it was endowed. It was as the garden of Paradise, from which the tempter was not absolutely excluded. We have already seen how a secret danger was wrapped up in the open profession of holy poverty, which so soon began to develope itself among the faithful. God struck down, by a most signal interposition of Providence, the guilty pair who first violated the conditions of the holy state. He thus set a mark of His own on the sacrilegious profanation of a state of life so dear to Him, which was destined in His designs to be fruitful in the Church in the production of a thousand noble works and institutions of heroic virtue. Soon after the first outbreak of the persecuting spirit, of which we have spoken in the last chapter, we must probably place a fresh appearance of internal danger, and the manner in which this was met by the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. We shall see in this instance also how the Church was pre-

served from a danger which, whenever it has not been checked, has been in principle mischievous to her peace ever since, and which perhaps in the days in which we live is as fruitful of evil as any other of the causes of the ruin of souls which are active in society.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, for that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." The days had not yet come for the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, and therefore we must understand by the "Grecians," as they are here called, the Jews born outside the Holy Land, but resident in Jerusalem, where they formed a class in some respects distinct from the natives of the country. They were Jews in blood and in religion, observing the Law and traditions as faithfully as if they had been born in Jerusalem itself. But there must have been many differences of manners and language, and many of these stranger-born Jews would have very little command of the Aramaic dialect, which was the vernacular language of Palestine in the time of our Lord and the Apostles. Very slight differences of this kind might constitute an important element of division. Thus it would appear that these Grecians thought themselves unrepresented in the body through whose hands the daily doles of food and other necessaries passed, and thus, without any evil intention on the part of any one, some kind of discontent sprang up among them. It was the first dawn of a jealousy on the score of nationalism, and it was in this that the danger con-

sisted. It would have been very easy to satisfy any complaints on the score of accidental negligence of this or that person, without any formal action of the supreme authorities in the Church. But the evil became indefinitely greater when it fastened on national feeling as its foundation. Divisions of class against class are most dangerous in any community, and much more divisions of nation against nation. In the present instance, the two parties, so to call them, were both one in their national origin, but the accidents of birth and education made them in many respects practically foreigners one to the other. This added the dangerous edge to the discontent, and made it necessary for the Apostles at once to find a remedy for the evil, which would prevent its spreading further and poisoning the mutual charities of the whole community.

It seems almost impossible to exaggerate the mischief that has been wrought in the world and in the Church by the evil principle which here manifested itself, in a form so apparently insignificant, in this first Christian community, while it was as yet in its first bloom of beauty and with its first glow of charity unimpaired. Our fallen nature makes us instinctively elevate self-love into a principle of action, and feeling, and judgment, the power of which we do not think of measuring, and the danger of which we do not think of providing against. We are to ourselves the centre of the universe, and we think it no harm to prefer ourselves, our own supposed rights or interests, to those of all around us, and to weave our affections, as by a legitimate right, around the most trivial objects which are connected

with ourselves. Thus our sympathies become narrowed, confined, dwarfed, stunted. We become petty, jealous, suspicious, captious, envious. In short, the whole beautiful virtue of charity is corrupted, if not destroyed. If it does not die, it is like a plant growing in an uncongenial soil, and under an unfavourable climate. We have seen self-love in its meanest and smallest form, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and the very strong manner in which, in the Providence of God, it was exposed and punished. But self-love manifests itself in larger and more specious proportions, when it clings around our homes, our families, our nation, or our country. All these things are legitimate objects of love. But they may be loved too much, and it requires all the power of Christian grace to keep down a propensity which is natural indeed, but childish and often mischievous, and quite unworthy of hearts which breathe the heavenly atmosphere of the Kingdom of God.

The love of these things has naturally some exclusiveness about it, and when the law of God says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour," the instincts of depraved nature add, "and hate thy enemy." Then we go on to make an enemy of every one or every thing that is outside the narrow circle of our petty affections. All these things easily become principles of division among men, and in consequence are hostile to charity. Thus a principle like that of the love of our country or nation has been made in all times, and not less in our own times than in others, the root of divisions which have not only generated undying national enmities, but which have also torn

the seamless robe of Catholic Unity. The Church has the mission of blending all elements of this kind into her one great family, one in faith and rule and one in love. But the elements of discord have proved too strong for her, and have defeated even her most supernatural principles. Men have set up heresies and schisms under the name of national creeds and national "branches." If we dwell on this thought as it deserves, we shall see the immense importance of this apparently trifling incident, in which nationalism first showed its poison in the Church, and the reason both for the immediate action of authority to stamp out the evil, and for its record in these her first annals in which the main elements of her history are so marvellously summed up.

It was now that the Church began to discharge one of the greatest and most salutary of all the offices committed to her by God for the benefit of the world, and what St. John calls the healing of the nations. For she has entrusted to her powers divine in their character and efficacy, not only for the teaching of the truth and the salvation of souls, the bringing them to the next world to the enjoyment of the glories of Heaven, but also for the pacification of earth, the elevation and felicity of human society as such, the making, as the Scripture says, of the kingdoms of the world into the kingdom of God and His Christ. The Church is sent into the world with the great mission of making peace, of destroying all the principles of division and dissension and discord and war, whether war between class and class, tribe and tribe, nation and nation, empire and empire, or the war of creeds,

principles, maxims, manners, customs, standards of right, which when they are different, generate feuds. She was to take the family as it existed in the degraded civilization of antiquity, and make it into the Christian home. She was to take the community of families, and create the Christian commonwealth or city, the Christian kingdom or nation. And out of the Christian nation collected into one body in her holy empire, she was to make a community of peaceful nations into which, in process of time, all the states of the world were to be collected in one great peace. The Roman Empire, which she was to supplant, or rather to create anew on a basis of her own, had been providentially set up in the world, first to facilitate her operations on mankind, and also as a kind of shadow and forecast of what she was to create for mankind without violence and without constraint. It was the boast of the Roman race that it had the mission to rule the nations by its imperial sway, and impose on the whole world the habit and the rule of peace. It is described in the prophecy, in which the course of history is sketched by Daniel to the end of time, as crushing and grinding and breaking to pieces all that it dealt with, because this was the process by which it produced the external unity and the concord which was its great aim. It ground the peoples under its sway by resistless force, and then it held them together by a most prudent and intelligent administration, which secured to them the blessings of law and peace and security as the return for the sacrifice of their independence.

That was what was possible by the means of

human power and policy, and it was an achievement which in its way has never been surpassed in the external history of the world. It was but a shadow of what was to be done far more perfectly and thoroughly by the Catholic Church, if only the world would have listened to her, and allowed her to work out the mission which God has given her. This was a mission which grew out of her work in the world, her direct work for the salvation and perfection of souls. It was not possible that she could be working the work of God by means of the faith and the sacraments and the other means of grace, which affect the souls of men one by one, without at the same time regenerating the family and the community, and introducing new and most powerful principles for the elevation of society as such. She could not touch and heal the centre of human life in the soul without also affecting the whole of human life moral and intellectual, social and political. When God raises man spiritually by the infusion of His Divine grace, nay, by the presence of Himself, the Holy Ghost, shed abroad in our hearts, as the Apostle tells us, He cannot but raise man also in every sphere of the life which belongs to his nature and his position in the universe. The gift of Divine regenerating grace in the soul contains in itself the germ of every elevation of which man's nature is capable, and which his work in the universe requires. And so it is no exaggeration to say that when our Lord sent His Church forth into the world, He placed in her hands the power of healing all the evils of society and humanity, even evils which belonged to the con-

dition of things which was not to last beyond this life.

But the Church of Jesus Christ was not to act on mankind as the Empire of the Cæsars had acted. She was to produce the reign of peace, not by crushing or destroying, but by unfolding all good and salutary principles, and giving them free scope and room to work. She was to enforce harmony and concord by the law of mutual respect, goodwill, and charity. The true principle of unity was not to be the accident of origin from a certain race or tribe, but the sharing by all men of the nature given them by God at their creation, and of the new relation of sons of God given to them all equally by a free gift through the Son of God making Himself Man. This was the one fundamental principle of Christian society, of which St. Paul could very soon speak as not having in it Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, but Christ to be all in all. The Church began this work, we may say, in principle, when she satisfied in her own way the complaints which had arisen among the multitude of her children, at the bottom of which there lay this dangerous principle of national jealousy. She did not crush down the complaints, she satisfied them. She let them choose their own administrators, stipulating only that they should be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. These we know she ordained deacons, thus giving them the highest rank in the hierarchy next to the sacred priesthood itself.

Another remarkable point is that the men who were chosen were all of them, apparently, of the

party, if we must so call it, from which the complaint proceeded, for their names are all Greek or Roman, and one of them was not even a Jew by race like the rest, for he was a proselyte of Antioch. But, what is still more to be noticed and insisted on, they were men of very great and conspicuous virtue and grace, for the first of them was the great St. Stephen, who was to be the first of the martyrs, and another was St. Philip, of whose great works there is so much said in subsequent chapters of the Acts. They were therefore men of the highest standing and largest capacity, though the work for which they were especially selected was only that of serving tables. For the Apostles seem to have wished to mark this clearly on the minds of the faithful, that the ministration to the poor, the care of the pensioners of the Church, and above all the preservation of unity and concord, were works on which she might wisely spend the labours and services of the noblest of her children. Thus the Apostles provided in the amplest way for the immediate requirements of the case, and the germs of division in that infant community were stifled in their birth. This has always been the way of the Church in dealing with such elements in human nature as that of which we are speaking. She gives them abundant scope, and leaves them no ground for complaint. But yet she does much more than this. For she takes these comparatively petty and partial objects of human interest and love, and she substitutes for them higher and nobler objects for the aims of the same parts of our nature. Instead of the interest of a family or a home on earth, which

may at any moment be laid desolate by sickness or calamity, or of a country which is but one small portion of human society, some narrow island, perhaps, with no great beauties to make it beloved, with no great resources to enrich its children, no geographical position, no genial climate to cherish and develope the puny treasures alloted to it by nature, and which has consequently no great record to show, even in the childish history of the world, she raises our hearts to the interests and needs and objects of the holy Catholic faith spread all over the earth, and gives us brothers and sisters to love and to care for wherever the sun shines. Instead of limiting our affections to a few, she sets before us a countless multitude who are one with us in Jesus Christ. She bids us make the home of our hearts in Heaven as well as upon earth, in the unseen world as well as in the visible, in the long years of eternity as well as in the present. There is our true country, our true home, the country which we can never love too much, the country, the love of which makes us no enemies, the country, the cause of which can never lead us to injustice or to aggression, because it is the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST MARTYRDOM.

SOMETHING has already been said of the eminent distinction of the seven men selected for the work of presiding over the daily distributions, in which, as was alleged, some negligences had occurred, which were so promptly provided against by this new measure of the Apostles. Their ordination as deacons, of which St. Luke speaks in this place, was an elevation, as we have said, in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and was not directly connected with the office which the seven had to discharge in the care of the alms of the Church. It gave them a large increase of grace, beside the sacramental grace which belonged to the Order to which they were raised. The custom of committing the treasury of the Church and the care of the poor to deacons was long continued in various parts of the world. In the present case, we hear no more of the "daily distributions," but we soon find that two at least of the seven thus promoted became very conspicuous for their activity and success in preaching the Gospel. The circumstances of their election, which made it a point of exquisite prudence that the persons thus chosen should be taken from that portion of the flock from which the complaints had

proceeded, had an incidental effect in preparing that step of enormous importance which was as yet held back, the admission of the Gentiles to the Church. Six of the seven were presumably Jews not of Palestine. St. Stephen himself is said to have come from Rome. The seventh, Nicolas, was actually a Gentile by birth. He was "a proselyte of Antioch." The term proselyte must here mean one who had become a Jew in the strictest sense in which it was possible, submitting to circumcision and becoming a keeper of the whole Law. Still his Gentile origin is a fact of great significance, especially when taken in conjunction with the "Grecian" origin of all the others. No one could object to him as a proselyte, but still the fact of his birth made his promotion a step beyond that of the other six. We here catch a fresh glimpse of that stupendous revolution, which was being silently prepared by God, in the rejection of the Jews and the admission of the Gentiles. Before we reach the full development of this wonderful counsel of God, we have many stages in the Sacred History to traverse. But when we know what the issue was that was being prepared, those preliminary steps stand out in a fuller and clearer light.

For a time, the seven become prominent in the history, as the Apostles were occupying themselves more exclusively in government, preaching, and prayer. "And the Word of God increased and the number of the disciples was multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly: a great multitude of the priests also obeyed the faith." We see in the later chapters of the Acts, as well as in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, how tenaciously even the Christians of

Jerusalem clung to the Temple worship. It is therefore a note of great significance that we are informed of the conversion of numbers among the priests, which must also have had a great effect on the people. Moreover, the attitude of the Pharisees, as led by Gamaliel, could not have been without its effect. At the same time the attempt to put down the Church by persecution, was for the time abandoned. There was little opposition to the teaching of the Apostles, and the effect of their miracles must have been as great as ever. The history now attaches itself to the person of St. Stephen. "And Stephen, full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Now there arose some of that which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them that were of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke."[1]

Here again it is a point worthy of notice that we find the controversy chiefly active among the Jews, not of Palestine, but of the dispersion. This is only natural. The Jews of Palestine lived in quiet observance of the Law and the traditions, and the questions which arose among them would be such as were called into existence by the disputes among their chief Rabbis, or the schools of Hillel and Schammai, and the like. The greater questions as to God's dealings with the world at large, the prerogatives of faith, the universality of redemption, and the like, of which we hear so much in St. Paul's

[1] Acts vi. 8—10.

Epistles, were in a great measure outside their range of thought. The Jews from abroad were trained in a different atmosphere. They lived among the inquisitive Greeks, who left no question unasked, no doctrine unexamined. They were in the midst of active political life and of restless philosophical speculation. They had to give an answer for their faith in Alexandria, in the universities of the Greek world, of which Tarsus, St. Paul's birthplace, was one, and to active minds in all the cities in which they dwelt—men who might affect to despise them and think them enemies of humanity, but who could not help being attracted by the simplicity and purity of their lives and the sublimity of their religion, by the side of which, even judged intellectually, polytheism was absurd and monstrous and philosophy a failure. It is not wonderful that Stephen and others like him should be ready to dispute on the doctrines of the Gospel with strangers to Judæa like themselves, any more than it is a matter of surprise, that as soon as the struggle between the Church and the Synagogue was transferred to the field of discussion and argument, we should find that the chief actors in the conflict belong to that class of the Jews who had been born and brought up outside the peaceful atmosphere of the Holy Land. This again is a part of the preparation by which the great change of the opening of the Church to the Gentiles was ushered in.

Jerusalem resembled modern Rome in one respect, that there were within its walls a great number of synagogues frequented by Jews of particular birth and nationality. As in Rome almost

every nation has its Church, so in Jerusalem the Jews from different parts had their own synagogues. St. Luke tells us that the controversy of which he is speaking was carried on against St. Stephen by members of various synagogues which he enumerates. They are the synagogues of the Libertines, the Cyrenians, the Alexandrians, and the Cilicians and Asians—that is of the province of Asia. All these except the first must have had in their members men brought up in the centres of Greek cultivation and philosophy. The Libertines appear to have been "strangers of Rome," as St. Luke speaks in his account of the Day of Pentecost. Pompey had carried a large number of Jews to Rome, where they were sold as slaves, and the children of these, when they had risen by their industry and usefulness to their masters, may easily have obtained their freedom and founded a community at Rome which, by other aggregations, became very numerous, and their synagogue might have been called "of the Libertines." Those who think that St. Stephen may have come from Rome will see a kind of confirmation for their hypothesis in the fact that the first-named among his opponents are from this synagogue.

"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke. Then they suborned men to say they had heard him speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." We are obliged to gather the subject-matter of the controversy waged between St. Stephen and his adversaries from the charges which are brought against him, however much of falsehood may have been mixed up in them. But we can hardly be wrong in thinking that the

question of the strict obligation of the Law, and the like, must have been raised, all the more as the Jews engaged in the dispute were brought up in the midst of Gentiles, and must thus have had such questions more or less familiarly before them. Nor is it at all inconsistent with experience, that such Jews should have been even more zealous for the strict observance of the Law and the traditions than others living ordinarily in the Holy Land. These observances were to them the characteristic badges of the children of the Covenant, as distinguished from the far larger populations around them, and in such cases the affections and even the intelligence are often inclined to exaggerate the claims of what is in themselves so distinctive. St. Stephen in his preaching and arguments had the promise of our Lord to rely upon, which St. Luke seems here to refer to, when he says that his adversaries could not resist the wisdom and spirit which spoke. "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist or gainsay."[2] And the speech which follows, in which St. Stephen pleaded before the Sanhedrin, is a marvellous instance of the guidance of thought and language which was especially to be vouchsafed when they pleaded before tribunals.[3]

We notice in the manner in which the death of St. Stephen was brought about many features which make it a kind of repetition of the Passion of our Lord. There are the false witnesses suborned to misrepresent what he may have actually said, giving it just the turn which was required in order to pre-

[2] St. Luke xxi. 15. [3] Acts vii.

judice against him those who were to sit in judgment. There is the collection, as it appears, of the Sanhedrin, or at least of some large and authoritative assembly, under the presidency of the High Priest. There is even a reminiscence of the charge made against our Lord about destroying the Temple. "This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place and the Law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and change the traditions which Moses hath delivered to us." The conjecture that St. Stephen was one of the Jews of the dispersion, who might have settled in Jerusalem for a time, does not rest on any quite certain foundation. But it is in harmony with the fact of his selection for the office with regard to which his name first meets us, and it is possible that such Jews, if many of them were more bigoted about the Temple and its services than the natives of Palestine themselves, may also have numbered among them many who took a larger and less national view as to the designs of God and as to the temporary character of the Mosaic dispensation.

Such men would come to Jerusalem full of zeal for the conversion of those whom they knew so well, among whom they had lived, and whom, in so many cases, they knew to be very virtuous and devout. There must have been scores of men among these Gentiles like the centurion at Capharnaum and his brother officer Cornelius at Cæsarea, and their Jewish friends might naturally ask whether the Christian covenant was to require of them to become strict proselytes to Judaism as a condition of admis-

sion to the Church. Our Lord Himself, though He was sent, as He said, only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, was continually speaking in not obscure terms of the admission of the Gentiles to His Kingdom. He said to the Samaritan woman that though salvation was of the Jews, the time was to come and indeed had come when the true worshippers of the Father were to worship Him neither in the mountain of Gerizim nor in Jerusalem, that is in neither place nor in any place exclusively. We are not told how far the doctrine contained in these words had by this time become a matter of discussion among the disciples and with their controversial adversaries, but probably the charge against St. Stephen may have been grounded in some measure on such a foundation. This hypothesis is quite in keeping with the facts before us.

The question of the High Priest to St. Stephen, asking him whether the charge was true, may remind us of the discomfiture of Caiphas when our Lord would not give any answer to the charges of the false witnesses. Before that, however, we find an incident mentioned in the case of the holy martyr which does not occur in the history of the Passion. After the charge had been made against St. Stephen, the Sacred Text tells us that "all that sat in the Council looking upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." It is clear that St. Luke must mean us to understand that there was something preternatural about the appearance of the face of St. Stephen, as might have been the case if he had been favoured with some heavenly vision, such as we know him to have been allowed at the

close of his discourse. We shall see presently the commentary that is made on this fact by the contemplative whose work we have so often used. But in any case, the heavenly vision which may have been vouchsafed to St. Stephen on this occasion, before he began his defence of himself to the Council, may be of use to us as reminding us of the ecstatic rapture in which his soul must have been entranced at the moment when that defence was to be made. Our Lord had forbidden the Apostles and others with commissions like theirs, to premeditate as to what they should say, when they were taken before rulers and tribunals. For it seems that it was often to be His will that on such occasions they were to have words put into their mouths which they would not have had the courage to utter as the results of their own preparation. The defences of the martyrs were to be utterances of the Holy Ghost, in the same way, to some extent, as the words of the prophets, who were to speak what God desired to be uttered at the time, without exclusive reference to the feelings or thoughts of the prophets themselves. It is very natural indeed to think, that God might use those on whom He was about to bestow the crown of martyrdom for the utterance of strong and severe denunciations which He would not put into the mouths of others whose preaching was to last longer. We have therefore every reason for considering this discourse of the first of the Christian martyrs as having been especially guided by the Holy Ghost throughout its whole course, though it appears at first sight to end somewhat abruptly and without the full complete exhaustion of the subject-matter. For

St. Stephen does not say a word in answer to the direct charge made against him, except so far as such answer may be supposed to be included in the historical summary of the dealings of God with the people, and of their ingratitude to Him.

It would be out of place in our present work to go through the speech of St. Stephen word by word, or sentence by sentence. It is enough to enable ourselves to catch the main drift and purpose of the discourse. It reads like a solemn upbraiding of the nation for their continual infidelities and ingratitude towards God. It ends by a repetition of the note which had already been sounded, almost uniformly, in all the discourses of the Apostles at this time, the note of reproach for the supreme guilt of the murder of our Lord. We find this in the discourse of St. Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and again in the speech of the same Apostle on the occasion of the first miracle. He repeats it immediately after, when he is placed with St. John before the authorities, after the miracle, and again when, with the whole Apostolic body, he was taken before the Council at the time when Gamaliel interfered and saved the Chief Priests from taking summary measures against the Church. It is as if the Apostles had been guided in their public utterances to keep always before the people and their rulers that they had filled up, and were still more to fill up, the measure of their fathers, as our Lord had said to them, so that the judgment which was to be exacted of them for all the righteous blood shed from the beginning of the world might fall upon them immediately.

Thus we may take this defence, as it seems at first sight, of the martyr, as also a sentence of condemnation of the Synagogue and of the Jewish nation, represented by its most learned and authoritative officials. St. Stephen puts in their right place and relation the two institutions which he was accused of speaking against, that is, the Temple and the Law. He goes back, as St. Paul after him went back, to the original covenant of God with Abraham, centuries before the time of Moses. He shows all through that there has been a continual spirit of rebellion on the part of the people against those whom God sent to them as leaders and deliverers, a spirit which was first exemplified in the treatment of Joseph at the hands of his brethren, and afterwards, more signally still, in the rejection of Moses when he wished to undertake the office of a saviour, and again when he was in the holy mountain of Sina to receive the Law from God. He speaks of the tendency of the people to relapse again and again into idolatry, for which God punished them in the desert, and afterwards by the Babylonian Captivity. This leads him on to the great outburst of indignant denunciation which closes the speech, in which he declares that the people always resisted the Holy Ghost, and that those now before him had treated our Lord, when He came in person, in the same manner in which their fathers treated the prophets, not one of whom has escaped persecution at their hands. This language reminds us of the words of our Lord to the Council after He had been condemned, and also of those which He spoke to the women of Jerusalem

who were bewailing His sentence as He passed up the Via Dolorosa.

But if the speech of St. Stephen was so full of zeal and indignation against the people who were represented by the Council before whom he spoke, we are not left without proofs of the tender and burning charity of the holy martyr towards those whom he was thus commissioned to denounce. He had to speak to them in the name of God, as about to lay down his life as a martyr, and he had also to imitate the sublime charity of his Master on the Cross. At the same time he bore solemn and public witness to the truth of our Lord's Divine Person and Majesty. "But he being full of the Holy Ghost, looking up steadfastly to Heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." This was the special confession of the truth in which his martyrdom consisted. "And he said, Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." It has often been remarked that this is the only instance in the New Testament in which our Lord is spoken of as the Son of Man by any one but Himself. But it must be remembered that this was precisely the point of the martyr's confession, that our Lord in His Human Nature was raised to the throne of glory at the right hand of God. "And they crying out with a loud voice stopped their ears, and with one accord ran violently upon him, and casting him forth without the city they stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, Lord Jesus

receive my spirit. And falling on his knees he cried with a loud voice, saying, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep in the Lord. And Saul was consenting unto his death."[4]

The martyrdom of St. Stephen appears to have its place in the Sacred History, not only on its own account, but also as representing and typifying the importance and efficacy of the whole glorious series of the martyrdoms which were to follow it until the end of the career of the Church upon earth. It sets before us in the first place the characteristic use made, by the enemies of the truth, of the established tribunals, sometimes civil sometimes ecclesiastical, before which the martyrs were brought, that their condemnations and sacred deaths might appear to be carried out by the authority of law, which had for its foundation the ordinance of God Himself. It represents the element of false accusation and subornation of witnesses which is also so very usual in such cases, and which is repeated constantly in the persecution of calumny which is ever going on against the Church, and which marks her controversial antagonists as the servants of the father of lies. It represents to us the heroic boldness and calm of the martyrs, a boldness and a calm evidently not the fruit of any strength of their own, and which have often of themselves been enough to bring about the conversion of well-disposed bystanders, and even of the judges themselves. It represents the extreme and divine charity which has also been so striking a feature in those who

4 Acts vii. 55—59.

have thus witnessed to our Lord, their patience and serenity, sometimes even their intense and overflowing joy in the midst of what appeared to be torture beyond human endurance. It represents in particular the charity of the martyrs to their persecutors and enemies, which has so often had for its fruit the conversion of those very enemies into children of the faith of the martyrs and even followers of their heroic labours for the truth for which they have suffered.

This may be the reason why St. Luke is so careful to inform us of the presence of St. Paul at the martyrdom of St. Stephen, which he makes the prelude and introduction, first indeed to the account of the fiery zeal of Saul for the extinction of the faith, and then of his glorious conversion and most fruitful labours for the Gospel while St. Stephen preached, and for which he suffered. All this has to be considered in our estimate of the importance of this narrative of the martyrdom of St. Stephen in the Sacred History before us. It was fitting, as we may think, that as martyrdoms were to be instruments of such immense value in the history of the Church, both for the sanctification and glorification of the saints, and for the advance and purification of the Church, there should be something of this kind at the very outset of her history. As there was to be a perfect instance of the miraculous evidences of her Mission, and of so many other features which were to be found in her story during a long succession of generations, so it was to be with the great feature of martyrdom. It was also in harmony with the general laws of the Kingdom

of God, that in each case these instances of such features which occur at the very outset of her course in the world, should be splendid and noble in their kind, and especially, as we shall see, splendid and noble in the fruits which they produced.

It is very natural that Christian contemplation should find a delight in considering the affections and thoughts which this new feature in the general history of the Church may have called forth in the tender and watchful heart of the Blessed Mother. As in the other features which have already occurred in the narrative on which we are commenting, our Blessed Lady would see in this the great and magnificent design of God, apart from any hindrance that might be expected to mar the full efficiency of the Divine counsel, in consequence of the poorness of the correspondence of men to the graces so profusely lavished on them. Thus in the beautiful institution of the common life and the poverty practised in the early Church in Jerusalem, she would see the gift of God in all its fulness and fruitfulness, rather than in any actual prophetic prevision of the scanty extent to which the institution was to be used in the ages to come. In the gift of miracles, considered as evidences of the kingdom and the grounds of faith in the word of the appointed preachers of the Church, she would understand what was meant by God to come from this boon, rather than what might possibly be on account of the hardness of the hearts of men. She had indeed the experience of our Lord's own Life and Ministry to enlighten her as to the possible failures of the Divine plan, but she could still regard it as in the intention of God,

and her heart would glow with immense gratitude in considering the ineffable love with which that beautiful provision had been made. The same thought applies with still greater force to her considerations of the gifts of grace, the means of sanctification, and the rest, of which she witnessed the first public introduction on the day of Pentecost, and afterwards. So it may have been with the careful provision made by the Apostles for the preservation of the most perfect unity and charity among the faithful under their care, which led to the appointment of the seven Deacons of whom St. Stephen was the chief. And again, in the same way, our Blessed Lady would understand, in a measure of her own, the ineffable mercy shown in the continual progress of the Gospel preaching, and the blessings to the Church and to themselves involved in the sufferings of the Apostles at the hands of the Jewish authorities. She could read the loving Providence of God in all these things with a discernment clearer than that with which the angels gazed on its workings from Heaven. She could praise and thank Him with a deeper and more intense gratitude, like that of the Sacred Heart of our Lord Himself.

If this was the case with the other great features of the history and of the providential dispositions of its incidents of which we have had to speak, it would be pre-eminently so with this last feature of martyrdom. It might have been guessed indeed by the angels that, as the salvation of mankind had been brought about by the suffering of the most painful and shameful death on the part of the Redeemer

Himself, so also sufferings of the same kind on the part of His servants and ministers would play a very large part in the propagation and increase of His Kingdom. Moreover, our Lord had spoken many words in the course of His Ministry which might well seem to be prophecies of great sufferings even unto death on the part of His chosen witnesses. It is natural to think that our Blessed Lady treasured up these hints, and had a peculiar insight into the value of deaths incurred for the sake of our Lord and of His Gospel, which would be so many repetitions of His own Sacrifice, of their immense power in the increase and consolidation of the Kingdom, of the special glory which was to await those who showed their faithfulness even to this highest stage, as well of the fury to which their enemies would be excited against them when they were sent forth as lambs among wolves. The Apostles had gone forth from the presence of the Council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of our Lord, when they had been scourged, and no doubt their joy was reflected in the heart of their Mother and Queen. But now had begun the still greater and more honourable and fruitful kind of suffering, on which the Church was in so many countries and parts of the world to be perpetually built up, generation after generation.

The leader of the white-robed army of the martyrs had laid down his life, imitating our Lord, at the very moment of his death, in his prayer for his murderers as well as in his resignation of his soul into the hands of God. The Church had now

at length begun to resist unto blood. It was a point in her history not less momentous than the first miracle, or the beginning of the Apostolical preaching. It might spread consternation and fear among the faithful generally, who might have hoped that the comparative gentleness with which their enemies had as yet treated them might still be continued. But that protection of Providence, which had seemed to shield the Apostles and their disciples from the worst kinds of violence, seemed now to be withdrawn. The storm of persecution had now burst in all its fury, and the Church was to meet it, not by resistance, or by the sheltering protection of any Divine interposition, but by suffering unto death. Our Lady would understand it as it was in the intention of God, a more precious gift than if legions of angels had been sent in defence of the faithful, a greater help to the advancement of her cause than the neutrality of Gamaliel or the paralyzing of the animosity of Caiphas.

It may not have been among the gifts imparted permanently to this Blessed Mother, that she should have had stretched out before her the history of the succeeding ages of the Church in full clearness of detail. In this manner she might not have had revealed to her all the great part which was to be allotted to the martyrs in the early centuries in the work of the foundation and consolidation of the Kingdom of our Lord. She need not have traced all the circumstances under which the Apostles were to bear witness unto death, or the long line of martyrs who were to succeed St. Peter in the See of Rome, or how the most conspicuous Bishops

all over the world, and many of the great apologists and writers in those ages, were to add to their other glories the crown of the martyr. She need not have foreseen in detail how the first preachers in so many countries, became also the protomartyrs and then the patrons of the places which they evangelized, nor the triumphs of those unknown millions all over the earth whose blood was shed so freely for our Lord to become everywhere the seed of His children. But she could know the high place in the designs of God and in the arrangements of His Kingdom which was allotted to the shedding of blood. She had stood by the Cross and seen the Redemption of the world wrought out by the shedding of the Precious Blood of her Son. She knew His words, that no man hath greater love than this, to give His Life for His friends, and she could see that, as the witness to the faith was what He required of His children, this witness could not be rendered in any way more perfect in love, more convincing in its testifying power, or more efficacious as an offering for the salvation of souls, than when it was rendered readily and joyously at the cost of life and all that is dear here below. So Mary could understand, even if the future were not specially revealed to her, that the first ages of faith generated by the Word of God as preached by the Apostles, would also be ages when that faith so generated would be witnessed to in the face of Heaven and earth by the shedding of the blood of multitudes, and that in this sense the martyrs were to be sharers in the great work of the Apostles themselves.

Some of the contemplatives consider that as our

Lady had taken the new Apostle, St. Mathias, to her heart with a special predilection, so also she had watched with a peculiar care and tenderness over the heroic youth, St. Stephen. It would not be anything beyond the ordinary features of the lives of great saints, if our Lady had had some special foresight allowed to her as to the shortness of his career and the special distinction which was decreed for him as the leader of the army of the Christian martyrs. If she had any such prevision, it would naturally make her regard him with an especial love, and assist him in every way possible to her by her prayers and counsel. A heart such as his would be drawn irresistibly to devotion to the Mother of our Lord, Whom he loved so ardently, and thus Mary would have increased opportunities of helping him in various ways. Maria de Agreda tells us that he most earnestly desired to see her once more before his death, and that the brightness in his face, of which St. Luke tells us, was occasioned by a vision in which she appeared to him at the moment and blessed him at the beginning of his trial. It may be that he had never seen our Lord, and that he had been prepared for his dying vision of the Son of Man in Heaven by familiar intercourse with her who resembled her Son in feature as well as in character. We cannot doubt that she was assisting him in spirit, while his defence was being made, and when the time came for him to imitate his Lord, as has been said, so closely by his prayer for his persecutors and murderers.

BOOK II.

FROM THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. STEPHEN TO THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST-FRUITS OF PERSECUTION.

THE martyrdom of St. Stephen, followed as it was by a period of persecution, hitherto unexampled in the history of the Church, marks an epoch in her annals the importance of which can hardly be exaggerated. It may be considered as showing us that, in the counsels of her God, she had reached the point of adolescence. She had attained her full stature, and was now fit to enter on that militant and suffering course which was to be more or less normal to her until the end of time, as the condition of her triumphs. Within a short time from the day of Pentecost, her organization had become sufficiently complete to admit of her coping with the world into which she was sent to carry on the work which our Lord had Himself begun, under the same conditions of difficulty, opposition, suffering, under which it had been begun by Him. The body of the faithful was most firmly knit together by mutual charity. The authority of the Apostles and of the other ministers of the Gospel had become defined and established by practice. The Christian worship, as distinct from the attendance in the synagogue and in the Temple, which was still frequented by the children of the Church, had become the daily delight and resource and support of thousands of souls.

The sacraments were freely administered, the Holy Sacrifice regularly offered, the preaching of the Word of God, the continual prayer and praise, the family life, the ascetic habits of private prayer and penance, and the catechetical training of those young in the faith in the holy Christian doctrine, were now so familiar and so valued that the system of Christian life was thoroughly established. Thus the faithful were prepared for the practice and propagation of this holy system, under the altered circumstances which now awaited them. They were fit to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

It was not in the Providence of God that the comparatively tranquil days, of which we have had to give some account in the last book, were to continue for ever. Rather, it was His design to launch the Church upon the world, as soon as she was fit for the work which she had to do, a work which could not have been accomplished without storms and battles, dispersion and suffering. So it pleased Him, now for the first time, to expose His Church to the furnace of persecution. As He had Himself been put under the winepress in His Sacred Passion, in order that from Him might flow the healing of the world, so it was now time for His Church to be put under the winepress, that she might seem to be outwardly crushed in order that her full fruitfulness might be developed in all its power. We do not know under what state of circumstances it was that the Roman rulers allowed a free hand to the Jewish authorities for the wreaking on the young community the malice which had long been smouldering in their hearts, though hitherto it had not poured itself out

in acts of general violence. Probably even Pilate did not choose to interfere with the interior discipline of the synagogues, as long as there was no public tumult to endanger the peace of the city or country. Even outside the Holy Land the Jews were allowed the very largest measure of self-government, wherever they constituted a considerable portion of the population. Thus we cannot be surprised at the permission which was virtually accorded to the Chief Priests to deal as they chose with the followers of our Lord. They designed nothing short of the extermination of the followers of Him Whom they had crucified, in all places whither their authority extended. They began, as was natural, with Jerusalem itself.

"And at that time there was raised a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all dispersed through the countries of Judæa and Samaria, except the Apostles. And devout men took order for Stephen's burial, and made great mourning over him."[1] It seems probable that these devout men, who appear to be distinct from the faithful themselves—who may have been prevented from approaching his body where it lay outside the gate which now bears his name—were friends of his, perhaps not yet openly Christians, belonging, as he may have belonged, to the school of Gamaliel. The incident is one of those which may be called typical. Our Lord's burial had been provided for by those who were not openly His disciples, and God has constantly interposed, sometimes even miraculously, but more often without an

[1] Acts viii. 1, 2.

open miracle, for the protection of the bodies of the martyrs from insult, and for their decent interment, intending them after no long time to be made objects of veneration and the great treasures of the churches for whose sake they have suffered. Not the less, however, did the persecution rage, and one of its most active instruments was Saul himself. "And Saul made havoc of the Church, entering in from house to house, and dragging away men and women, committed them to prison."

We have more than one description of his proceedings, in the several speeches which are preserved to us in the Book of the Acts. In his speech to the people at Jerusalem from the stairs of the fortress of Antonia, he mentions his action as of greater severity, as it appears, than might be imagined from the words of his historian. "I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."[2] In his speech before Agrippa he adds more details. "And I indeed did formerly think that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which also I did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prisons, having received authority from the Chief Priests, and when they were put to death I brought the sentence. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being yet more mad against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."[3] To these statements we may add his words to our Lord, related by himself, at the time of his vision in the Temple, when he had to leave Jerusalem to save his life. "Lord,

[2] Acts xxii. 4. [3] Acts xxvi. 11.

Thou knowest that I cast into prison and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee, and when the blood of Stephen Thy witness was shed, I stood by and consented, and kept the garments of them that killed him."[4]

There are a few questions which may be raised as to the exact meaning of these statements of the Apostle. When he says, as the words stand in our version, that he "brought the sentence" against the martyrs, the Greek words seem most naturally to signify that he gave his vote against them, as may have been the case with the condemnation of St. Stephen, although that seems to have been the result of a sudden general fury, rather than of any formal vote of the judges in the assembly. Again, the language here used seems to imply that there were many martyrs unto death, besides St. Stephen, and it seems most probable on other grounds that this was the case. The example was set in Jerusalem by the Sanhedrin itself, but it was largely followed, both in Judæa and in other parts. It is stated on the authority, apparently, of old tradition, that there were about two thousand martyrs slain in this persecution. The process seems to have been that the Christians were seized and put into prison, then examined in the synagogues and required to blaspheme the name of our Lord, and then, in many cases, put to death if they refused. St. Paul's words about compelling them to blaspheme do not necessarily imply that the compulsion was successful. The words may mean that he endeavoured to make them blaspheme. At the same time, it must be

4 Acts xxii. 19—21.

allowed that there probably never was a general persecution which did not produce some defections by the side of many martyrdoms.

We have thus a picture of a state of things which was quite new to the Church when it began, but which was to be continually repeated in her history. The organization of the Synagogue and the system of government and discipline under the Chief Priests was very complete, no doubt far more complete in the Holy Land than elsewhere, and the faithful had not as yet emancipated themselves, so to say, from the authorities who thus wielded a very tyrannical power. They could look for no protection from the Roman power, unless there were some reasons of public utility to secure them such protection. Thus we find at a much later period, and in a province so remote as that of Achaia, that the Proconsul Gallio refused to interfere in a case of persecution at Corinth, declining in any way to meddle with matters which he considered foreign to his jurisdiction.[5] Thus the persecution must have had its full course, and it must have been all the more efficacious for mischief because it wore the aspect of legality, and seemed to be a measure of just severity. Such persecutions are more severe and searching than the outbreaks of popular violence, which soon spend their fury, however savagely they may rage for a time.

But the sacred history leaves aside the details of the persecution for the present, in order to follow out the other and more engaging subject of the blessed results of the sufferings of the Church in the

5 Acts xviii. 17.

conversions which were the fruit of the dispersion of the faithful. We cannot doubt that these results were far more widely extended than we might gather from the simple narrative of St. Luke. The Evangelist only mentions two or three instances of the propagation of the Kingdom by the means of the refugees, but there must have undoubtedly been many more of which no mention is here made. What we have must be considered as a specimen of this kind of result of the persecution. Here again we need not linger over the details as if we were writing a commentary on the Acts. St. Luke mentions first of all the conversion of Samaria. This was mainly the work of St. Philip, the next in order to St. Stephen in the list of the seven Deacons. "And Philip going down to the city of Samaria, preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord were attentive to those things, which were said by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, for many of them who had unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, went out, and many taken with the palsy, and that were lame, were healed, and there was a great joy in that city."[6]

The Samaritans were, in the eyes of the Jews, heretics and schismatics, and they had also been very conspicuous in the later history of the holy people as bitter enemies of Jerusalem and of the worship there. Just as modern Protestants, in order to avoid the authority of the ever living Church, appeal to the ancient Fathers and primitive ages as interpreted by themselves, so the Samaritans would accept no Scripture but the Pentateuch of

6 Acts viii. 5—9.

Moses, and went back to the early history of the Patriarchs as authorizing their rival place of worship on Mount Gerizim, which had been famous as a sacred spot in the memory of the nation before Jerusalem was conquered or the Temple built. Although our Lord Himself had in His lifetime forbidden the Apostles to preach to the Samaritans, and although He never made their country the scene of His own preaching, in the same way as Galilee or Judæa, He had still had the mercy to stay with them a day or two on His journey from Jerusalem to Galilee, before the beginning of His public preaching, and it was on that occasion that He had spoken so beautifully to the Apostles about their future successes, which were to be founded on the labours of others who had gone before them.[7] The present success of the Evangelical preaching was the fulfilment of the promise then made, and must have come home to them as such. But it was also a revelation to many among the faithful, tending to add one more line to their growing knowledge that the exclusiveness of the Jewish system, in which they had been brought up, was not to be the rule in the Church of our Lord, but was to give way to a wide comprehensiveness, in which national distinctions and principles of separation were to be swept away, and in which the only heretics were to be those who did not accept the teaching of the world-wide Church, and the only schismatics those who rebelled against her central authority and tore the seamless robe of her unity of faith, discipline, and government.

7 St. John iv. 38.

It is in the account of the conversion of the Samaritans that we first come across a famous name, that of one of the earliest opponents of the Church and authors of false doctrines which were to lead astray some of her children. By a curious accident, if so it may be called, Simon Magus has come down to the Christians of the present day rather as the father of the sin of Simony, named after him, than as what he chiefly was, one of the first of the heresiarchs or false teachers of the age of the Apostles—if indeed the name of heresy can be applied to a conglomeration of errors which has hardly the appearance of having much in common with the Christian faith. "Simony" was not a part of this absurd system which he fabricated from a number of various sources besides that of the Gospel teaching. Simon seems, from the account of his doctrines which remain to us in the *Philosophoumena*, to have been a syncretist of the most ambitious class, the author of a system, if system it can be called, in which the errors of Persian Zendism, of Indian Buddhism, of the Jewish Cabala, of the Alexandrian Platonism, the esoteric doctrines of Egypt, and of polytheism itself, were mingled up with what he chose to take from Christianity.[8] Of course we cannot know how far he had proceeded in his ambitious conglomeration of the various elements here mentioned, at the time of the appearance of the Gospel preacher at Samaria. The account given of him by St. Luke describes him more as a sorcerer than as having any system of his own.

8 See Darras, *Hist. de l'Eglise*, t. v. pp. 360—364.

"Now there was a man named Simon, who before had been a magician in that city, seducing the people of Samaria, giving out that he was some great one, to whom they all gave ear, from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the power of God which is called great. And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had bewitched them with his magical practices." The later accounts of which we speak attribute to Simon almost identically the means of magic which are in use at the present day among spiritists and mediums. They also speak of his dealings with evil spirits, but this part of the chapter is unfortunately imperfect. It is easy to see how such practices might have secured him the great influence which he seems to have wielded at Samaria. The headquarters of heresy was a natural place at which such practices might be rife, and where they might easily gain credence for the claims of the adept to be "some great one." In the present day the Protestant countries are those in which things of the same kind are most frequently successful, that is, as compared with Catholic populations. Still there have unfortunately been many Catholics who have yielded to the unlawful thirst for knowledge of the unseen which they pretend to gratify. The diabolical agencies which are often mixed up with these practices are more rife in pagan countries, although these also are frequently found in Christian communities.

The history seems to explain to us the character of Simon by what follows: "And when they had believed Philip, preaching of the Kingdom of God,

in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." The true miracles of the preachers of the Gospel with their evidently Divine power, the beneficent results which they produced, which were altogether wanting in the false signs of the magician, and the pure and powerful doctrine which followed them and was attested by them, brought about, by the aid of Divine grace co-operating with the word of God as preached by Philip, a sincerity and force of conviction which was to the delusions of Simon as light to darkness. But the future heresiarch was willing himself also to be among the believers. No one could discern better than himself the difference between his own false powers and those exercised by Philip. Simon had probably a quick intelligence. He could grasp mentally the coherence of the Gospel proofs, as is the case with so many so-called philosophers of later days, who can understand the evidences of religion without a true conversion of heart from their sins. The practices with which Simon had familiarized himself have a debauching and demoralizing effect on the mind, even in cases where there has been little more of positive wrong than the indulgence of an unlawful curiosity. We may perhaps understand in this way the statement that Simon himself believed also, and being baptized, "he stuck close to Philip, and being astonished wondered to see the signs and exceeding great miracles which were done." It will soon be seen how far his conversion was sincere. His character was probably incapable of that true humility which is essential in such cases, and prayer must have been

difficult to a mind so dissipated and overclouded as his.

Philip, by whose means the conversion of the Samaritans had been wrought, was only a deacon, at least he was certainly not an Apostle or a bishop. It is in accordance with this that we should hear nothing of the manifestations of the gift of the Holy Ghost as accompanying or following the baptism of the Samaritans. The conversion of Samaria would in any case have been an event of much importance, and the earliest Apostles would well remember what had passed between our Lord and themselves on the occasion of His visit to that part of the country. But the presence of Apostles was also required by the fact which has just been mentioned, as to the restricted powers of St. Philip. "Now when the Apostles that were in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent to them Peter and John." These two Apostles were the chief of all in the public eye, and they had been our Lord's companions at the time when He had sat weary with His journey by Jacob's Well, and had held that memorable conversation with the woman of Samaria, which had led to the conversion of many of the people of Sychar, close by. "Who when they were come prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for He was not as yet come upon any of them, but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." That is, they had not received any of those extraordinary and wonderful graces, manifest to the external eye, which were very usually given at that time, sometimes when Baptism was conferred,

sometimes after it had been conferred, and. as we shall see in the case of Cornelius and the first Gentile converts, even before Baptism itself: "Then they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost," in the sense and with the effects already named. "And when Simon saw that by the imposition of the hands of the Apostles the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying: "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." He seems to have made this offer in all simplicity, being accustomed to acquire secrets of his magical art in various ways, by purchase or by some service to those from whom he was to receive them, and thinking that the Apostles were like other men who had or seemed to have such powers to impart.

But Peter said to him: "Keep thy money to thyself to perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast no part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Do penance therefore from this thy wickedness, and pray to God if perhaps this thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee. For I see thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity." These words seem to confirm the opinion that Simon had received Baptism in bad dispositions, and that repentance was necessary for him in order that he might receive the grace of the sacrament which had been imparted to him externally. Perhaps he had thought that by following the stream with those who had before

believed in him, he might retain his influence with them, and when he saw the wonderful effects of the imposition of the hands of the Apostles in the sacrament of Confirmation, he became desirous of obtaining the power which the Apostles exercised, hoping, as we might say, to become the Christian bishop of the new community. The gall of which St. Peter spoke may describe the interior malice of his heart, still full of guilt and sin, and the bonds of iniquity may refer to the debt of punishment still owing to God for them, which had not been remitted in Baptism, on account of the badness of his dispositions. The words about his having no part nor lot in this matter seem to refer to the Christian and Apostolical ministry, which it was the ambition of Simon to attain, and thus it is that he becomes formally the first in the sin which has always gone by his name, which consists primarily in obtaining the powers or positions of the Christian priesthood or episcopate by money or other worldly means, a sin which is committed as well by those who impart them in this way as by those who obtain them.

This conversion of Samaria is an incident such as frequently recurs in the history of the Church. For the time Jerusalem and the country around it were closed to the preaching of the Gospel, and the good Providence of God consoled and compensated to the Church by the conversion of those who had hitherto been strangers, and who might have been supposed to be most of all hostile to the new faith, which came to them as an offshoot of the religion of the Jews. It must have been an

unexpected conquest to the majority of the faithful, like the conversion of the heathen nations in the East and in the West, which followed soon after the apostacy of the north of Europe in the sixteenth century. In the very depth of their affliction when they were left almost alone in Jerusalem, the Apostles received the tidings of the success of the mission of St. Philip. The two Apostles did not return tc the Holy City immediately. They took the opportunity to enforce the teaching of Philip by their own preaching and testification to the truth of our Lord's Resurrection, and also to spread the Gospel in the country around Samaria, a part of the Holy Land, in which it does not appear that His own ministry was ever exercised on a large scale. Thus the old life which they had led in His company was for a time renewed, with the immense difference that they now were endowed with the full powers of the Holy Ghost as well as with the most perfect intelligence of the Christian doctrine. "And they indeed having testified and preached the Word of God returned to Jerusalem, and preached the Gospel in many countries" or places "of the Samaritans." To all appearance the persecution was still raging, but it was their office to remain usually in the Holy City until the storm had passed away.

St. Luke goes on to tell us of another incident in what may be called the Acts of St. Philip, which might almost have been thought to have been selected for insertion by the Evangelist for the sake of the beautiful contrast which it presents to the last narrative. He tells us how St. Philip was directed

by an Angel to make his way towards the southern extremities of the Holy Land, on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. St. Philip obeyed, and thus fell in, on a lonely part of the road, with the treasurer of Candace, Queen of the Ethiòpians, who was either a Jew of the Dispersion or a full proselyte, for he had been to Jersualem to worship in the Temple, and was now returning to his own country. He was sitting in his chariot and reading the prophecies of Isaias, and St. Philip was directed to approach the chariot and enter into conversation with him. He was reading the well known passage from the fifty-third chapter, in which the Passion of our Lord is described. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb without voice before His shearers, so opened He not His mouth. In humility His judgment was taken away. Who shall declare His generation? For His life shall be taken away from the earth." Philip, hearing him read, asked him whether he understood what he was reading, and the eunuch answered him, "And how can I, unless some man shall lead me?" Then Philip took his seat by his side in the chariot and explained to him the prophecy. "And the eunuch answering said, I beseech thee, of whom doth the Prophet speak this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached to him Jesus," explaining the prophecy and its fulfilment in our Lord. "And as they went on their way they came to a certain water, and the eunuch said, See here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart,

thou mayest. And he answering said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they went down into the water both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord took away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing. And Philip was found in Azotus, and passing through he preached the Gospel to all the cities till he came to Cesarea."[6]

Tradition fills up for us the history of this eunuch of the Queen of Ethiopia so far as to tell us that he became the Apostle of the Gospel in his own country. His conversion is a type of the manner in which the truth is sometimes propagated, as it seems, by the way. Apostolical men fall in by an apparent chance with souls already prepared by the grace of God for the reception of the faith, and conversation on religious subjects leads to the explanation of some text of Scripture, or some theological doctrine, from which the mind of the learner is led on to the possession of the whole cycle of necessary truth. The occasion is thus seized which might not, humanly speaking, recur, and then the new convert, some man of simple and candid and humble mind, is made in the Providence of God the instrument for the conversion of many others. There was probably a considerable amount of intercourse between Ethiopia and Egypt, and from thence the passage to the Holy Land was very easy. We have already had occasion to speak of the large Jewish populations in Alexandria and other cities of Egypt, and it is

9 Acts viii. 26—40.

highly probable that there were many Jews in the neighbouring countries of Africa. It is therefore in no way wonderful that God should have made this chance traveller the foundation-stone of a Church in Ethiopia, where he would probably find many of his fellow-countrymen well inclined to the truths which he had so readily received. Thus another great step in advance towards the wider diffusion of the Gospel preaching had been taken quietly and silently, while the Apostles were almost alone in their secret life in Jerusalem, and the Chief Priests and Pharisees were congratulating themselves on the approaching extinction of the odious sect which believed in our Lord.

It was in truth the admission almost of a new nation to the Kingdom of Christ. It was at least the foundation of a new Church. Philip may have seemed to the eunuch even more of a direct messenger from Heaven than he was, for his sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance may have made him think that there was something supernatural about him. The eunuch went on his way rejoicing, and no doubt he had received from the Evangelist in their short conversation sufficient instruction in the elements of the faith and of the Christian rule of life to enable him to guide himself and others for a time, until he was able in some later visit to the Holy Land, or in some other way, to receive fuller instruction. He was already well instructed in the Jewish Law, and for such converts comparatively little was required, as soon as they grasped the main truth of the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Incarnation and Redemp-

tion, of which the holy people were already in possession. This was the second great triumph of the Gospel preaching by which the Church was consoled by God in her deep affliction after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and like the conversion of Samaria, it was brought about by the instrumentality of the close companion of the first martyr. But another and a still greater triumph and consolation was imminent, before passing on to which we may as well gather up the other intimations of the diffusion of the Gospel at this time which are to be found in the concise words of the Acts.

St. Luke's first statement about the dispersion of the disciples is that they were scattered through the countries or country parts of Judæa and Samaria, but at a later time he tells us that those who were dispersed by this storm of persecution went about as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none but to the Jews only. "But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they were entered into Antioch, spoke also to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great multitude believing were converted to the Lord."[6] We are not informed whether this addressing of themselves to the Gentiles was prior in time to the conversion of Cornelius and his friends by St. Peter, which is mentioned before it in the history. St. Luke seems to be following the order of signal triumphs in this part of his history, and it may have been really very difficult to keep the exact order of time when he had to speak of events which were nearly simul-

6 Acts xi. 20, 21.

taneous and in different parts of the Empire. This first dispersion was no doubt the beginning of a far wider range of preaching than had ever been attempted before, and we may fairly conclude that the dispersed Christians, who preached wherever they went, belonged to other parts of the world, besides those which are named in the narrative. But, if so, they would certainly not forget the claims of their own countries or kindreds in the spreading of the knowledge of salvation. As the history of the Church proceeds it becomes more and more difficult to attempt to trace its details in various places, and we may fairly suppose that what is related of the acts of Philip is a specimen of what was done at the same time by others of the seven, and that what is said of the men of Cyprus and Cyrene might also be said of converts from among the natives of other islands and other distant cities.

The propagation of the faith, even before it was generally preached to others than the Jews, must have proceeded at lightning speed, and it was a process which few persons at that time would think of chronicling in the records of the beginnings of so many new Churches. The best authorities that can be found as to the foundation of Churches in various parts of the world, if we except the very few mentions of such events which we possess in the Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles, are certainly the local traditions, wherever such traditions or traces of such exist. Such traditions may be liable to occasional corruptions and accretions in the course of time, like all other records on which history has to be built. But they are in the main undeniably

trustworthy. These things are hidden from us in the lapse of time, but they are more likely to survive on the spot of the labours of this or that Apostle than anywhere else. For this reason it is not in accordance with sound historical principles to reject such well authenticated traditions as that which assigns the first preaching in Spain to the Apostle St. James the Great, which may have been at a time a little later than that at which we have now arrived, but cannot be very long postponed, on account of the proximity of the martyrdom of that great Saint at the hands of Herod Agrippa. In the same way the Apostolate in Provence of St. Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary Magdalene, may have been at no great distance of time after the martyrdom of St. Stephen.

Traditions like these are but specimens of a large number of statements, and it is very likely indeed that for one account of an Apostolate which has survived there might have been a score of equal authority which are entirely lost to us. But it is well that we should have no narrow or scanty conceptions as to the great fruitfulness of the Church under persecution, both in accordance with the laws of Providence in general by which her life on earth is governed, and in particular because of that early fecundity of her youth and vigour, when her guides were the Apostles themselves, when Mary was yet in her midst to aid with her prayers and counsels, and when there was comparatively little in her own children to mar or shackle the free exercise of her marvellous powers for the salvation of the world. The records of the Acts are, as has been said more

than once, simply specimens of what took place in those wonderful times, and the modesty and conciseness of St. Luke cover an immense field of beauty which is reserved as to its details for the delight of the inhabitants of Heaven, but as to the existence of which we can have no reasonable doubt even now.

We can hardly doubt that the Blessed Mother of God was one of the few who lingered in Jerusalem during the time of this severe persecution. There could be comparatively little danger for her, even humanly speaking, and if there had been great danger, she would not have shrunk from it, nor would the special protection of Heaven been wanting to her. St. John certainly remained, and her place was to be where he was. If she was to be the support and consolation of the Church by her presence, as representing our Lord, by her counsel, and by her prayers, she could discharge her office better at the centre of danger than elsewhere. As the news arrived of one after another of the compensations with which God consoled the Church under her affliction, there would be no heart like that of Mary to see in them all the power and mercifulness and promise for the future which they contained in the intention of God. Each such item of intelligence brought home to her motherly heart a fresh crowd of children for whom she was to care, a fresh multitude of responsibilities, dangers, hopes, fears, and possible triumphs of grace, all of which would be for her matter of prayer and praise.

We at this distance of time hear only, as far as our knowledge depends on the short narrative before us, of Samaria receiving the Word of God, of the

seed full of promise sent to Ethiopia in the person of Philip's convert, of the preaching of the Word in Cyprus and Antioch, and of its diffusion in other places, which may be supposed to have been more or less closely connected with the places actually named, as the country round about Samaria was evangelized by the Apostles after their mission to Samaria itself, and as Philip went through several towns before he reached Cæsarea. But at the time, and considering the zeal and charity of the dispersed brethren, as also the rapid communication which may have taken place of any such triumphs of the Gospel, we may feel sure that there were many other subjects of rejoicing, thanksgiving, and prayer of the same kind as those of which we are directly informed. The case of Simon Magus also introduces to us a class of which he was by no means to be the only specimen, and its occurrence would indicate to a heart like that of our Blessed Lady's danger in the future for the Church against which her prayers would rise. The adhesion of Samaria to the Church would be cause of great joy, for the country of which it was the capital was full of reminiscences connected with the earlier history of the holy people, and of the sites of great deliverances or victories. But these must be considered as only a small part of the occupations of the thoughtful prayers and intercessions of the Blessed Mother in her retreat at Jerusalem.

CHAPTER II.

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

We have spoken of the conversion of the Samaritans, of the Ethiopian eunuch, and of a probably large number of events of the same kind, the details of which have not come down to us, as compensations offered by God to His Church for her sufferings under the first great persecution. The word compensation barely expresses the full truth. The martyrdoms and other sufferings which followed on the death of St. Stephen were in themselves gains to the Church. They increased the fortitude of her children by the glorious examples of those who suffered. They gave opportunities for a witnessing to the truth which might never have been otherwise afforded. They spread the name of our Lord and the influence of His followers even among their enemies, in whose ranks were numbered, as always, many good souls who had taken their part against Him in ignorance and unbelief. They had given the whole community of His disciples a claim on the fulfilment of that promise of fertility which was implied in His own gracious saying about the grain of wheat, which must needs fall into the earth and die if it was to become fruitful, and to which great fruitfulness was promised if it should so die. Besides

this, the persecution had increased the number of the glorified saints in Heaven, and so had furnished to the Militant Church fresh helpers before the Throne of God, whose prayers were now mighty with the power of the world to come.

Thus the gains which followed on the persecution were not altogether mere compensation for losses, in the ordinary meaning of the words. They were expansions of His Kingdom, the acquisitions of fresh realms and of new multitudes of subjects. So it always is, although it may not always be in the Providence of God that these fresh conquests should follow so immediately as in the case before us, on the sufferings by which they were won. In this case, moreover, they were more than the simple additions of new territory to an Empire already fully founded and organized. They were steps in the development of the Empire to its full natural proportions. They were stages in its growth from infancy to youth and manhood. They shook off the trammels which hung around the Church, as swathing clothes around a child. The hearts and minds of the faithful were expanded and enlarged, and they began to see more clearly the amplitude of the inheritance of the Church, and the principles which were to come into play in order that she might grasp that inheritance to the full.

It was undoubtedly a great step when the Samaritans, with whom the Jews would have no intercourse, became loyal children of the Church, sheep of the same fold with the faithful of Judæa and Galilee. It was another step, when the message of the Gospel was borne to the far south by the Ethiopian

eunuch, although he may have addressed himself, in the first instance, only to the task of making his Jewish fellow-countrymen partakers of his own ineffable joy. It was something to fill Cyprus and Antioch, and perhaps Spain, Provence, and Asia Minor, and other parts of the Empire, with devout believers, even though at first the Word was preached to the Jews only. The mere instincts of Christian charity must have been enough to make such converts eagerly long for the time when the glad tidings of salvation could be handed on to the heathen around them, many of whom had been already won from the religion and morals of paganism by the sublime simplicity of the Jewish creed and the purity of manners which accompanied it. It is often the way of God to kindle in Christian hearts a burning desire for some onward step of progress, which He is preparing to grant to their prayers, and which, is the execution of His own long matured purpose. He inspires prayer, that He may grant what He desires.

The next step in this crowning by God of the sufferings of the Church with the precious gift of fruitfulness was the preparation of the chosen instrument of the greatest change and advance which have ever occurred in the history of the Church. We are all perfectly familiar with the story of this conversion, as it is told to us in the narrative of St. Luke, which has also to be supplemented by the statements of St. Paul himself, both in his speeches in the Acts, and in his Epistles. It appears from all that remains to us of this kind, that, as has been said, the persecution in Jerusalem itself was carried

out in the most thorough manner. Private houses were searched for persons who were supposed to be believers, they were taken to the synagogues, where some form of words which contained a blasphemous abjuration of our Lord was proposed to them, and if they refused this, they were punished in various ways, including death. So severe a persecution naturally drove large numbers of the faithful to take refuge in flight, and they would probably betake themselves to cities more or less remote, where they might practise their religion in peace. The authorities at Jerusalem were soon aware of the exodus of the mass of the faithful from Jerusalem, and this might perhaps have contented all but the more violent spirits among them. But such men as Saul must have felt that as long as the new sect was allowed to hide itself in other places, it would not be sufficient to remain content with its apparent extermination in Jerusalem, even if that could have been effected. The position accorded to the Jews in the Empire, in the cities and provinces of which they were allowed to retain a distinct national organization, made it possible to pursue the fugitives and bring them to justice, as it seemed, as well elsewhere as in the capital. So Saul went to the Chief Priests, and obtained letters to the synagogue at Damascus, and perhaps other places, empowering him to seize any disciples of the Nazarene whom he might find, and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

We have already said that there are three accounts of the miraculous conversion of St. Paul. Besides the simple narrative of St. Luke, in the

proper place in the history, St. Paul, on two separate occasions, spoke of it in public in speeches which are recorded in the Acts. The first of these occasions is that of his speech to the people from the stairs of the fortress in Jerusalem, when his life was in danger from their violence. We have the report of this in the twenty-second chapter of the Acts. The other occasion was when St. Paul had to defend himself before Agrippa and Festus, and this is reported in the twenty-sixth chapter. On each of these latter occasions St. Paul's words added something which had not been mentioned before. But these additions are made rather to the account of the words of Ananias to him at Damascus, or of our Lord's in his subsequent trance at Jerusalem, than to the incidents with which we are all well acquainted. We take from these at present the words which relate chiefly to the actual incidents of what we call his conversion. "And it came to pass as I was going and drawing nigh to Damascus, at mid-day, that suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and falling on the ground, I heard a Voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And He said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me, saw indeed the light, but they heard not the Voice of Him that spoke with me."[1] That is, as we gather from the narrative of St. Luke, they heard sounds as of some one speaking, but could not distinguish the words. And both in the earlier narrative, and in the second speech, we have the additional words

[1] Acts xxii. 6—9.

of our Lord, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." The image used represents resistance to a lord or master, and it may seem to imply that Saul may have received some promptings of conscience or intimations of the will of God before the moment of his conversion. In the last speech St. Paul adds much to the words of our Lord on this occasion. "But rise up and stand on thy feet, for to this end have I appeared to thee, that I may make thee a minister and a witness of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things wherein I will appear to thee, delivering thee from the people and from the nations unto which now I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a lot among the saints by the faith that is in Me."[2]

We may gather many things from these great words of our Lord to His chosen Apostle, uttered, as St. Paul tells us, at the very time of his conversion. In the first place, it is clear, though it is not distinctly asserted, that St. Paul at this time saw our Lord in His Sacred Humanity. Our Lord says, "For to this end I have appeared to thee, that I may make thee a minister and a witness of those things which thou hast seen." Thus St. Paul's office was to be in all respects alike to that of the other Apostles, and it is thus that, when he counts over the witnesses of the Resurrection of our Lord in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he mentions himself last, but

[2] Acts xxvi. 16—18.

still as one of the witnesses, as one born out of due time, and unworthy to be called an Apostle because he had persecuted the Church of God. Nevertheless, he was a witness, and it is on this account as well as on others that the Catholic theologians teach us that this appearance of our Lord to St. Paul was not a simple vision, such as those which are so often vouchsafed to the saints. In those visions the Person who appears is not present in the body, but only apparently so, whereas there are some few occasions, of which few this is one, on which it is believed that the Sacred Humanity of our Lord was actually Itself present and visible, so that the words which St. Paul heard came out of the very mouth of our Lord Himself. Thus St. Paul became a witness of the Resurrection, because he could testify that he had seen and conversed with our Lord after His Resurrection from the dead. This alone would be enough to raise our thoughts regarding this apparition to a higher level.[3]

In the second place it is clear from these words of our Lord that St. Paul must have received, then and there, a very large amount of supernatural enlightenment as to the religion of which he was to become a chief preacher, its mysteries and principles and methods of propagation. After the first simple declaration, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest," our Lord proceeds to speak to His Apostle, rather as to the details of his particular mission than as to the elementary truths of the Creed. He tells him he is now sent to the nations

3 *Vide* Suarez, *De Mysteriis Vitæ Christi*, disp. li. sect. 4.

or Gentiles, and that he will be protected in the execution of his mission, both from them and from the people, by which word must be meant, as it seems, the people of the Jews. The mission to the Gentiles, however, is the most prominent and particular point in the language here used, and this is evident both from the words in which the mission is conveyed, the personal pronoun being used, "to whom now I Myself send thee," and also by the sequel in which words are used which do not so aptly apply to the chosen people—"to open their eyes that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a lot among the saints by the faith that is in Me."

Holy Simeon at the Purification had used similar words for the conversion of the Gentiles, "A light for the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." It is natural also to find St. Paul often using the imagery of this first revelation of our Lord to him, as when he speaks to the Colossians of "giving thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy," or able, "to be partakers of the lot," or inheritance, "of the saints in light, Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption through His Blood the remission of sins."[4] It is probable that it is to this first revelation that St. Paul refers when he speaks of his Apostolate as received not from man but from God. And thus he speaks of his vocation as having been deter-

[4] Coloss. i. 12—14.

mined by God from the very beginning—"When it pleased Him Who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles"[5]—and in that place he goes on to dwell on the fact that he did not receive his instruction for the purposes of his Apostolate from man, not even from the Apostles themselves, but by revelations communicated to him as it appears, in the years of his retreat in Arabia.

All these sayings of St. Paul at subsequent times must be taken into account as illustrating the simple narrative given us by St. Luke of the circumstances of his conversion. They show us that that conversion was no common incident even among conversions, but brought about by the special and personal interposition of our Lord Himself. They raise the conversion of St. Paul to the level of the very few most memorable and significant occurrences in the history of the Kingdom of the Incarnation. It was not so great a work of God as the Annunciation, or other mysteries in the lives of our Lord Himself and of His Blessed Mother, but short of that unattainable height among the works of God, it must be understood to have but few peers among such magnificent outpourings of grace. It is something like the call of Abraham or of Moses, something like the confession of St. Peter, and the conferring on him of the power of the keys. It must not therefore surprise us if we have to dwell at length on this momentous event in the history of the Church during the time when it was the arrange-

5 Galat. i. 15, 16.

ment of Providence that our Blessed Lady should be still upon earth. And it sheds a great light on the subject of the immense fruitfulness of persecution, and also of the intercession of the martyrs, that this step in the advance of the Kingdom should be so immediately connected with the death of St. Stephen, and the outburst of savage persecution of which it was but the first act.

The ordinary effect on the saints of the visions which are occasionally vouchsafed to them, even when such visions are not of so very high an order as that of which we are now speaking, is to fill them with light, joy, spiritual strength and vigour, to increase in them enormously any gifts which they may have before received, while at the same time they are filled with confusion and self-abasement, a great sense of their own nothingness and unworthiness, and thus with the most profound humility. It is also natural that they should be filled with great light and strength and courage as to the particular mission, or vocation, or work, with reference to which these Divine favours have been granted to them. It is hard to think that our Lord can make Himself present in these extraordinary ways without some special design, and this must be much more true when the visitation is of that extremely rare and exceptional kind which was the case in this apparition to St. Paul. We may fairly measure the greatness of the spiritual gifts which were now bestowed upon St. Paul by the fact that the Incarnate Redeemer of the world verily and in Person made Himself the messenger from Heaven on this occasion. We may fairly also suppose that when

our Lord told the prostrate saint to rise and go into the city, and there it should be told him what he was to do, the words do not merely refer to the instruction which he was to receive from Ananias or any other minister of the local Church, but also to further communications of the same kind with those which he had already received, and that thus the three days and nights during which he remained without food and in darkness were passed in the most intimate communication with our Lord, as He Himself said to Ananias, "Behold he prayeth."[6]

This only adds greater force to the consideration which is so often made on this passage, that our Lord referred even the chosen vessel of grace, whom He had Himself converted by His own presence, to the ordinary teaching of the Church. We find that when St. Ananias is sent to St. Paul to admit him formally into the Christian community by holy Baptism, he does not offer him any detailed instruction either on this point or on any other, as if he was conscious that the person to whom he was speaking had already received sufficient light on the articles of the faith. The historian adds that after his Baptism St. Paul took food and was strengthened. It would be natural that he should be exhausted by his three days of strict fast, and therefore the words may simply mean the food which he was so much in need of for the body. There may, however, be a reference to the food of the soul in Holy Communion. It seems also likely that this great conversion was not made public at once, and that the future Apostle left Damascus immediately to spend

[6] Acts ix. 11.

the long time of retirement in Arabia, of which he speaks in the Epistle to the Galatians.

It is clear that we are to consider the short account of this marvellous event which St. Luke gives us in his narrative as describing only the bare outward incidents in the most concise way. St. Luke knew that he would have to give at a later place in his work the report of the two speeches of St. Paul, of which mention has been made. He knew also that, before he published his work, the Epistle to the Galatians had been written by St. Paul, in which many details are given which it was not his own direct business to recount, and that the eminent dignity of the Apostle, whose companion he was, was already a fact known to the faithful all over the world. Thus his account in the place of which we are speaking is as concise as we say, and it leaves out for the time any reference to the great commission which, as we learn from St. Paul himself, was given to him by our Lord at the very moment of his conversion. St. Luke in the place before us only tells us how the great Apostle asked our Lord, "trembling and astonished, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said to him, Arise and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou shalt do. And Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw nothing. But they leading him by the hands brought him to Damascus. And he was there three days without sight, and he did neither eat nor drink."[7] Then St. Luke gives his account of the mission of Ananias by our Lord, after which there fell from his

7 Acts ix. 6—9.

eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight, and rising up he was baptized, and when he had taken meat he was strengthened. From this the Evangelist passes on to the visit of the Apostle to Damascus after his long retirement in Arabia, of which he makes no mention at all.

In order to get a full, though very concise, account of St. Paul in the years which immediately followed his conversion, we must join his own statements in the Epistle to the Galatians, with which St. Luke must have been well acquainted when he wrote the Acts, to what is here said so shortly by the Evangelist. It must be remembered that in the Epistle to the Galatians St. Paul is defending his own authority as an Apostle, and especially the independence in that authority, against his Judaizing opponents. St. Luke's object is quite different, and it is therefore not surprising that his language, even in speaking of the same events, is not identical with that of the Apostle himself, and that he should also omit one or two facts which the Apostle urges. St. Paul tells us that after his conversion, of which he speaks with the most touching humility and gratitude to God—"When it pleased Him, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately I condescended not to flesh and blood, neither went I to Jerusalem to the Apostles who were before me, but I went into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus."[8] This accounts for by far the larger portion of the time which is embraced by St. Luke

[8] Galat. i. 15—17.

in the few verses which follow in the Acts on the account of his conversion and baptism. These verses tell us that "he was with the disciples at Damascus for some days." He was already known to them through Ananias, who appears to have been their bishop, and it is very natural that he should have been guided to begin his career as a Christian teacher there. It is here that we must remind ourselves of St. Paul's own words a little before the passage in the Epistle which has just been quoted. "I give you to understand, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me, is not according to man. For neither did I receive it of man, nor did I learn it," speaking apparently of the two methods of gaining instruction, oral, and by reading, "but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."[9] These words shed a great light on the other statement concerning his retirement in Arabia, which it seems must have been the time when the Christian doctrine and the system of the Church, and the historical facts of our Lord's life and teaching, were revealed to him. He thus became an independent witness as to all these things, possessing them with the same fulness of grasp as the other Apostles, and being thus fitted for his Apostolate.

The Evangelist continues, "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogue, that He is the Son of God. And all that heard him were astonished, and said, Is not this he who persecuted in Jerusalem those that called on this Name, and came hither for that intent, that he might carry them bound to the Chief Priests? But Saul increased much more in

9 Galat. i. 11, 12.

strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, affirming that this is the Christ. And when many days were passed, the Jews consulted together to kill him. But their laying in wait was made known to Saul. And they watched the gates also, day and night, that they might kill him. But the disciples taking him in the night, conveyed him away by the wall, letting him down in a basket." [10] In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul tells us that the ethnarch under Aretas, King of Arabia, to whom Damascus seems to have been ceded by Caligula, immediately after the death of Tiberius, guarded the city to apprehend him. The two statements amount to one, for the ethnarch seems to have been the Jew to whom the internal government of the Jewish community was confided. "But through a window, in a basket, was I let down by the wall, and so escaped his hands." [11]

The next step in the history is related both by the Apostle and the Evangelist with the same difference of purpose, but the same practical harmony of various statement. St. Paul simply says, "Then, after three years," from the date of his conversion, "I went to Jerusalem to see Peter"—in the Greek text it is to seek out, or to question, Peter—"and I tarried with him fifteen days. But other of the Apostles I saw none save James the brother of the Lord." [12] St. Luke's account is much more circumstantial. "And when he was come into Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples, and they all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple." The suspicion

[10] Acts ix. 20—25. [11] 2 Cor. xi. 33. [12] Galat. i. 18, 19.

was perfectly natural, as he might have been directed by the enemies of the faith to feign conversion, in order that by passing for a disciple he might acquire an intimate knowledge of the Christian community, which would be fatally serviceable to its enemies, of whom Jerusalem was full, even if the persecution was now ended. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles." Barnabas may have been a friend of his youth, he had perhaps known him at Tarsus, and might at all events have been his fellow-disciple in the school of Gamaliel. We know from the Epistles how reluctant St. Paul must have been to speak of the miraculous circumstances of his conversion, in which favours quite unparalleled were bestowed upon him by our Lord, and he may have taken the manner in which he was received in a penitential spirit. The Apostles, in the account of St. Luke, are pointedly contrasted with the disciples. "Barnabas took and brought him to the Apostles, and told them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had dealt confidently in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out in Jerusalem, and dealing confidently in the name of the Lord. He spoke also to the Gentiles and disputed with the Grecians. But they sought to kill him, which when the brethren had known, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him away to Tarsus."[13]

This is one side of the facts. St. Paul gives his own account, from another point of view, in his speech on the stairs of the fortress Antonia, reported in

[13] Acts ix. 27—30.

the twenty-second chapter of the Acts. "And it came to pass when I was come again to Jerusalem, and was praying in the Temple, that I was in a trance, and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste and go out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me."[14] So it often is, the witness of those who ought to have the greatest weight is rejected, because it is so cogent and unanswerable. At the present day Protestants will sooner listen to any Catholic missioner than to one who has been converted from among themselves, and whose sacrifice of everything for the sake of the truth is so great a reproach to themselves. "And I said, Lord, they know that I cast into prison and beat in every synagogue them that believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was shed, I stood by and consented, and kept the garments of them that killed him. And He said to me, Go, for unto the Gentiles afar off will I send thee!" St. Paul does not say that he was himself aware of the plot against his life, and we thus see that he was prepared to depart at the suggestion of the faithful, by the vision which he had received himself. St. Paul's account in the Epistle to the Galatians naturally leaves out both the danger to his life and the vision. He simply says, "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was unknown by face to the Churches of Judæa which were in Christ, but that had heard only, he that persecuted us in times past doth now preach the faith which once he impugned. And they glorified God in me."[15]

[14] Acts xxii. 17—21. [15] Galat. i. 19—21.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADMISSION OF THE GENTILES.

It must be obvious, on considering together all these statements concerning the beginnings of St. Paul's career in the Church, that a considerable space of time has been covered by St. Luke in the comparatively few verses in which his narrative is contained. He makes no mention of the three years of which the Apostle himself speaks, and although St. Paul's language does not make it necessary to believe that the whole space of three years were spent by him in Arabia, we must at least think that the third year after his conversion was begun, or far advanced, at the time when he went first to Damascus, then to Jerusalem, and finally to his own country at Tarsus. But we have no other incident related by St. Luke in the Acts which we can with any certainty assign to this interval, unless we invert the order of his narrative, and this a careful student of this writer, who is eminently chronological, will hardly venture to do.

The next event of which St. Luke speaks in the Acts is the peace which ensued after the persecution of which he has been engaged in recording the fruits. It appears that shortly before the death of Tiberius some things passed in Palestine which

may have contributed to the cessation of the persecution. Pilate, who is mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke as having mingled the blood of certain Galilæans with their sacrifices, by a cruel massacre in the Temple, took occasion of something like a popular disturbance in Samaria, to shed a great deal of blood near Mount Gerizim, putting to death many very influential and wealthy Samaritans. A deputation was sent to Lucius Vitellius, the Prefect of Syria, uncle to the future Emperor of the same name, whose subordinate Pilate was, and the complaints thus made were favourably received. Pilate was obliged to go to Rome to answer the charges made against him. He did not arrive in Rome till after the accession of Caligula, who exiled him to Vienne, in Gaul. He is said to have died there by his own hand. Vitellius also went on this occasion to Jerusalem, and while there deposed Caiphas from the High Priesthood. Some Christian historians say that both Caiphas and Annas committed suicide as well as Pilate. Vitellius acted kindly to the Jews, and it may have been in consequence of his presence, and of the removal of the High Priests who were stained with the murder of our Lord, that the persecution ceased.

The cessation of the persecution which probably ensued after the dismissal of Pilate and Caiphas by Vitellius, must have been more assured after the second year of the reign of Caligula, who then gave orders for the erection of his own statue in the Temple at Jerusalem, and thus filled the Jews with immense alarm. This must fully have occupied their thoughts during the period of nearly two years

which preceded the assassination of the Emperor. The question for the readers of the Acts is, to see whether we can find any events of importance to the Church with which it may be safe to fill up the interval which is thus left us in the Acts. We are not, indeed, writing a history of the Church, but there may be certain incidents which stand out, almost as landmarks in that history, which may fairly be inserted in a volume like this, as having aroused a special interest in the loving heart of the Blessed Mother of our Lord.

One such incident which may occur as finding place most naturally in the interval between the conversion of the Samaritans and the peace of the Church of which St. Luke next speaks, is certainly the visit of St. Peter to Antioch, which was the beginning of his occupation of the Episcopal Chair in that city. The tradition about the Chair of St. Peter at Antioch is far too venerable and well authenticated to be set aside in any history of the Church. The only question about it can be at what point of time we are to place this memorable step in the onward advance of the Gospel Kingdom. It is ordinarily set down as having been taken seven years at least before the similar occupation by the Chief of the Apostles of the See of Rome, and if this is so, it must be placed at some early point after the outbreak of the persecution which followed St. Stephen's martyrdom. It is not at all necessary to suppose that St. Peter resided long at Antioch on this occasion. What he had to do, was to fix there an Episcopal see, of which he was the first Bishop. It was the wise policy of the Church, if policy that

can be called which was so natural an act of prudence and wisdom, to fix the principal centres of her hierarchical organization in the great capitals and cities of the Empire. That this act of St. Peter is not mentioned by St. Luke is no argument against its historical truth. St. Luke ordinarily says nothing at all of the hierarchical arrangements of the Church. He does not mention that St. James was appointed the Bishop of Jerusalem, nor does he mention, at a later date, that St. Peter became Bishop of Rome, or St. Mark Bishop of Alexandria. These are but chief instances of a whole multitude of such facts which are passed over in silence by the author of the Acts.

Again, St. Luke, who was himself of Antioch, does not tell us who was the first preacher in that great city, the chief city of the East, unless Alexandria may be thought to have overshadowed it. He tells us, however, that on the dispersion of the faithful by the persecution at Jerusalem, some of the refugees went to Antioch, and for some time spoke the Word to the Jews only. It is by no means unlikely that when the second city in the Empire was thus occupied, so to say, by the Church, St. Peter may have gone there, as he had gone with St. John to Samaria, and may have been guided to begin the taking possession of the Empire by fixing on Antioch, for the time, as his own See. In the sermon delivered by one of the greatest of his successors in the See of Rome, on occasion of the feast of his Chair in that city, we find the order of events thus sketched out. "Thou hadst already instructed the people who of the circumcision had

become believers, already thou hadst founded the Church of Antioch, where the dignity of the name of Christian sprung into being, thou hadst filled Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, with the preaching of the Gospel Law,"[1] and then he goes on to speak of St. Peter's preaching at Rome, and occupying the Holy See. St. Leo may have spoken from traditions remaining in the Roman Church, and the countries which he mentions as having been visited by St. Peter in Asia Minor are those which are enumerated by the Apostle himself at the opening of his own First Epistle, which is thought by many critics to be addressed to Jewish converts exclusively, as is the Epistle of St. James. It is not certain, however, that the Epistle of which we speak is addressed to communities converted by St. Peter himself. But there is no peremptory reason against the supposition, nor against the absence of St. Peter from Jerusalem during a considerable part of the interval of which we are speaking. If the Chief of the Apostles passed on to preach to the Jews of the dispersion in Asia Minor, the subsequent statements of St. Luke about the Antiochene Church become very intelligible. He tells us that at first the Word of God was only spoken to the Jews, but that later on some of the refugee Christians, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, "spoke also to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believing were converted to the Lord."[2] Thus St. Peter might have left Antioch

[1] St. Leo, Serm. i. *De SS. Apostolis Petro et Paulo.*

[2] Acts xi. 20, 21.

before these conversions, and when he admitted Cornelius and his companions to the Church, it would be the first act of the kind which had taken place.

St. Luke next tells us of a kind of circuit made by St. Peter in the southern parts of Judæa in his office of Chief Pastor of the flock of our Lord. He only mentions one or two anecdotes of this circuit, as an introduction to the admission of the centurion Cornelius and his Gentile friends to the Church. But we may gather from his language that the visit of Peter was not confined even to the part of the country specially named as the scene of the miracles recorded by him, and that there must have been at this time Christian communities both in Judæa itself and in Samaria and Galilee. Some writers seem to find a difficulty in this, while others attribute the existence of these communities to the labours of Philip the deacon. But it is clear that the range of country mentioned by St. Luke is too extended to admit of this hypothesis. "Now the Church had peace throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and was edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and was filled with the consolation of the Holy Ghost."

It is well that we should be continually reminding ourselves that there must have been many communities of Christians wherever our Lord had Himself preached. The history of these communities is not preserved to us by any authentic record, but their existence ought to be taken for granted unless there is some positive evidence that they did not exist. Nothing can be more natural than that

those who had listened to the teaching of our Lord and seen His miracles in Galilee and elsewhere, should hold together after the Resurrection and Ascension, and that there should be constant communication between their members and those of the central body at Jerusalem. On the other hand, it is most improbable that the labours of our Lord in such places should have been without any permanent effect, although we are tempted to forget the extreme probability of the contrary, by the strict silence of St. Luke, who certainly never meant it to be so interpreted. It seems particularly improbable that in Galilee itself, the scene of so large a portion of our Lord's Ministry, there should have been no relics of it in the shape of communities of believers. In the passage before us, the historian distinctly contradicts this supposition. For he speaks of the Church throughout Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, whereas there has been no mention at all in the previous narrative of the Acts of any preaching in Galilee. We are therefore naturally led to the conclusion, even from the words of the text, that there must have been communities throughout Galilee as well as Judæa and Samaria, formed from the disciples of our Lord Himself. St. Luke, in fact, takes their existence for granted, and thus implies that his readers must do the same.

Nor must we pass without notice the quite unfounded supposition that the Church which St. Luke speaks of as existing throughout Judæa itself was the work simply of the preaching of St. Philip, of which mention has been made. If that had been the case, it would have been necessary for some of

the Apostles to be sent from Jerusalem to perfect the work which St. Philip had begun. But of this there is no mention at all. Nor can it be said that there is no trace in the Gospels themselves of the preaching of our Lord in that part of the Holy Land. The speech of St. Peter to Cornelius and his friends, which follows almost immediately in the narrative before us, speaks of the Word of God as having been "preached throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached," and this he says is well known to those whom he is addressing. And it seems clear from a careful inspection of the text of the many chapters of the Gospel of St. Luke, in which the Evangelist supplies so fully the history of the last six months of our Lord's own preaching, that the greater part of that time was spent by Him in the country parts of Judæa, and that the incidents and teaching which are there recorded belong to that period and that place. We thus gain a great deal from these few words of St. Luke about the Church in these parts, for they give us a picture of the numerous Christian communities throughout the country in which our Lord had been Himself the preacher, existing, or at least springing almost spontaneously into existence, within the short time which had elapsed since His Resurrection and Ascension, and of the large amount of preparation for the further development of such communities which He had Himself made. And the silence of the Evangelist as to these Christians is only another proof of the easiness with which we may fall into mistakes or false conceptions even of very important facts, if we allow ourselves

to think that nothing passed or nothing existed beyond what is mentioned in his most concise narrative. St. Peter's words not only speak of the Word having been preached throughout Judæa, but they also describe our Lord exactly as He might have been remembered by the inhabitants of the country, how "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil." This gives a picture of our Lord in His Personal Ministry, just as Cornelius and others might have heard of Him, or even seen Him.[3]

St. Luke describes St. Peter as going all round the country, and not as confining his visitation, as we may call it, to one particular part, although the scene of what he is about to mention was so confined. "And it came to pass that Peter, as he passed through visiting all, came to the saints who were at Lydda," a town in the fertile south of Judæa, not far from the coast, and in the still beautiful plain of Sharon. There was there a small community of believers, whose numbers were largely increased after the miracle wrought by the Apostle on the cripple Eneas. While he was there, a good and most charitable woman, called Tabitha or Dorcas, died at Joppe, not far from Lydda, and the disciples, hearing of St. Peter's presence at Lydda, sent to beg him to come to them. They must evidently have hoped that he might be able to raise her to life, and the funeral rites seem to have been delayed for some hours in order to leave time for his coming. St. Peter started immediately, and found the body laid in an upper chamber, "and all the widows

3 See Note at the end of this chapter.

stood about him weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made them. And they all being put forth, Peter kneeling down prayed, and turning to the body he said, Tabitha, arise! And she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up, and giving her his hand, he lifted her up. And when he had called the saints and the widows, he presented her alive. And it was made known through all Joppe, and many believed on the Lord. And it came to pass that he abode many days in Joppe, with one Simon a tanner."[4]

The Sacred Text adds that St. Peter stayed many days at Joppe. We cannot tell whether he was aware of the step of immense importance in the history of the Church which it was now to be his commission to take. Probably neither he nor any one of the Apostles or chief disciples of our Lord had any doubt at all that the time was to come for the admission of the Gentiles to the Gospel Kingdom. This had been most clearly prophesied in the Old Testament, and also intimated by our Lord Himself, Who at the very end of His sojourn upon earth had bade them go and make all nations His disciples. But the time and the manner was as yet hidden, although, as we have seen, the history of the Church up to this time had been almost a series of preparations for the great change which was to come. We find in the lives of the Saints that there are often periods of rest and quiet, while the great missioner or the founder of some new Order waits in silence and retirement for the clear intimation of the will of God as to his next step, or perhaps

4 Acts ix. 32—43.

simply devotes himself to prayer and contemplation, without having any important step at all in immediate prospect. Then the light from Heaven dawns on a sudden, and the beginning of the new work comes about in some unexpected incident or meeting. St. Peter must have been in high repute among the inhabitants of Joppe, whether believers or unbelievers, on account of the great miracle which he had lately wrought in raising Tabitha to life. But he took up his abode with a believer of no great station, for Simon was a tanner, and we are told that the trade which he followed was looked down upon by the stricter Jews, on account of the risk of ceremonial defilement which it involved in dealing with the skins of animals sacrificed in the heathen temples. St. Peter might have been little before the public eye during his sojourn at Joppe, however much his name may have been in honour. It is hardly rash to think that the miracle had been providentially arranged, in order that his reputation for sanctity might prepare the faithful for receiving without question the great act of authority which he was now to perform.

The sacred history now introduces us to a character which may be considered as typical—one of a class of good souls which has always existed and will always exist in the world around us. Cornelius, the centurion of the band called the Italian band, was apparently of Roman origin. The "cohort" which had this name seems to have been so called because its officers, at least, were Italians, the common soldiers being recruited from the provinces in the Empire, and so of various nationalities.

Cornelius may have been connected with the great Roman family whose name he bore, a family second to none in the distinction of its members and in the great services which they had rendered to their country. A centurion was not an officer of very high grade, but it appears from the account given us, both of Cornelius and of the other famous centurion mentioned in the Gospels as living at Capharnaum, that the position which it conferred was considerable. The centurion of the Gospels had built a synagogue for the Jews, and Cornelius is described as having many kinsfolk and friends, as well as a fairly large household. Cæsarea, the city where Cornelius was stationed, was one of the cities built by the various members of the Herodian family, who were fond of displaying their wealth and power in this way. It was on the coast, about thirty miles north of Joppe, and its builder, Herod the First, had enlarged its port to the size and form of the Piræus. It had soon become one of the most important and prosperous cities in Palestine, and was the ordinary place of residence of the Roman Governor when he was not at Jerusalem. It was probably to a considerable extent a non-Jewish city, and it was thus a very fitting place for the quiet admission of a family of Gentiles to the Church, without any great *eclat* or parade, a place also where such a step might be taken without exciting the violent hostility of the unconverted Jews, as might have been the case at Jerusalem.

The picture drawn for us by St. Luke of Cornelius and his friends is as beautiful as it is simple. "There was a certain man at Cæsarea named Cornelius, a

centurion of that which is called the Italian band," or cohort, "a religious man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people," that is, to the Jews, "and prayed to God always." His contact with Judaism had produced in him the effect which very often followed under such circumstances, the effect of dissipating the errors and immoral traditions of heathenism, of reviving in him all the elements of natural religion, the belief in the One God, and, further, of arousing in him the devotional and ascetical instincts, the instincts of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. He had followed the light vouchsafed to him, the light which lighteneth every man coming into the world, he had helped himself by attention to conscience and the universal traditions of piety, and then, probably, had come across the sublime faith and pure morality of the Jews, and had drunk in with a willing heart the new sources of illumination thus opened to him. It ought not to surprise any one who knows how extremely good and bountiful is God to those who thus make the most of advantages, great in themselves, though slender when compared to those bestowed on the direct heirs of His covenants, to find a man of this kind already full of personal holiness and capable of receiving and accepting without difficulty a revelation from God by means of an Angel. "This man saw in a vision manifestly, about the ninth hour of the day," therefore about the time of our Lord's death on the Cross, "an Angel of God coming in to him, and saying to him, Cornelius! And he beholding him, being seized with fear, said, What is it, Lord?" For

fear is natural to man in all communications by means of the blessed citizens of Heaven, but it does not appear that Cornelius was ignorant of the existence of Angels, or unready to believe in the gracious dispensation whereby they are màde the messengers of God to us. The question, "What is it, Lord?" implies that he at once understood that the Angel brought him some command from Heaven.

"And he said to him, Thy prayers and thy alms are come up for a memorial in the sight of God." We are not told whether the prayers and alms of which the Angel speaks were directed by Cornelius to any special intention, such as the guidance of which he might have felt himself in need, whether, for instance, he should embrace Judaism as a full proselyte, or perhaps even pass through it to the new community of believers in our Lord, of whose existence he was probably aware. It may have been so, for persons in the condition in which he was may well have heard a great deal about the new faith. Our Lord Himself had probably preached in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea, and Philip, whose great zeal and conspicuous miracles must have attracted attention wherever he was, had come there lately, if, indeed, Cæsarea was not already his ordinary home, as we find it to have been at a later period in the history of the Acts. The language of the Angel is equally applicable to prayers and almsdeeds offered in general as a homage to God, or to the same offered with a particular desire in the mind. They may have been long continued, and now at last were to have their fruit.

"And now send men to Joppe, and call hither

one Simon, who is named Peter, he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside. He shall tell thee what thou shalt do." The Angel does not instruct Cornelius as to the details of the Christian faith, nor the duties imposed on those who profess it. He simply refers him to the Church. But in this case he does not send him to Philip, who was on the spot, nor to any Christian of the place, if such there were, but to the one person on earth to whom the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven had been confided, the one, even among the Apostles, who was the Rock on which the Church was to be built. It was perhaps some little occasion for humility and faith to the good Cornelius, to have to send for one presumably unknown to him, lodging at a distance with a tanner by the seaside. But if there was any difficulty, it was easily overcome. "And when the Angel who spoke to him was departed, he called two of his household servants and a soldier who feared the Lord of them that were under him, and when he had related all to them, he sent them to Joppe." We find then that Cornelius was not alone in his religiousness and in his devotion to the true God. We have already heard that he feared God with all his house, and now we hear of another believer among the men under his command, as we are told afterwards of his kinsmen and friends. There was already among the heathen in Cæsarea the nucleus of a Christian community, which would spring into existence as soon as the door of the Church was opened. And we cannot suppose that Cæsarea was singular in this respect. All over the Empire there was usually, outside the strict pale of

the Synagogue, a circle of these devout heathen "fearers of God," who in many cases were soon to form a larger element among the believers in our Lord than the Jewish converts themselves. The Jewish religion appealed to the natural law of God and the innate instincts of piety which were to be found in thousands of good hearts, even under the darkness of paganism, and the persons thus prepared for the complete revelation of the mercies of God which is to be found in Christianity were even less likely, in many cases, to find in the new faith the difficulties which shocked the Jewish prejudices. And so it will ever be with imperfect forms of Christianity. Their positive teaching is seldom more than partially erroneous, and the peculiar prejudices against the Church which so many of them teach do not find a ready response in good, simple, and honest hearts.

We need not here repeat at any length the account given by the Evangelist of St. Peter's famous vision at Joppe, which took place about noon on the very day on which the messenger of Cornelius arrived. The vision touched on one of the most inveterate of human prejudices, that of the distinction between clean and unclean meats. The distinction is one of the strongest elements in many countries where the system of caste prevails, and it is probable that it had been introduced into the Mosaic system with an express design of separating the Jews most effectually from other nations. It is one of those things to which an exaggerated importance is easily attached, and its observance is thus often clung to when other far weightier matters of the law of God

are sacrificed. Thus we sometimes find ill-instructed Catholics of careless lives who do not make much scruple about lying, or cheating, or breaking the Divine law in other matters, who will yet almost die of starvation rather than eat meat on a Friday. But to the mind of St. Peter, as we see by his words on his arrival at the house of Cornelius, the vision in which he was commanded not to treat as unclean what God had cleaned, was a symbolical instruction bidding him lay aside every feeling that hindered him from welcoming the Gentiles as brethren in the faith with the same entire fulness of affection as he would have welcomed Cornelius and his friends if they had been "Hebrews of the Hebrews." The vision was also significant, no doubt, as touching the point as to which it was likely that there would be the greatest difficulty, and as showing that the difficulty was to be resolutely faced and overcome, because it was a part of the Divine plan of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, not only that distinctions of race and manners were not to exclude from the Church, but also that they were actually to be obliterated and to cease, in order that all her children might be knit together in perfect equality and perfect charity, and the most intimate daily companionship.

We need not relate at full length the well known story of the arrival of the messengers of Cornelius at Joppe just after the vision accorded to St. Peter, his courteous reception of them after they had delivered their message, and his departure with them the next morning for Cæsarea, accompanied by six of the faithful of Joppe. These were prob-

ably taken by St. Peter with him in order that they might be witnesses of all that passed at Cæsarea. Although he may not have as yet received any revelation as to what was to take place there, it must be considered as certain that he expected that some great work of God was to follow, as he had already received an inspiration that they had been sent by the Holy Ghost, and that he was to go with them without any doubt or fear. We pass over in the same way the details of his reception by Cornelius and his friends, how he declined the "adoration" which might have seemed excessive and as meaning more in a heathen than it would have meant in a Jew, and how he at once told the assembled company that they must know how he was violating the traditional exclusiveness of his own nation in associating with them freely, but that God had taught him to call no man common or unclean. Cornelius then related his vision, and declared to St. Peter in the fulness of his heart, "Thou hast done well in coming. Now therefore all we are present in thy sight to hear all things whatsoever are commanded thee by the Lord."

St. Peter's speech may be reported to us almost word for word, and this may account for the want of perfect grammatical sequence in the sentences. "Then Peter opening his mouth said, In very deed I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh justice is acceptable to Him." Not that all religions are the same before God, but that He, being the God and Father of all, considers all as His children in whatever dispensation they may live, and accepts

them and blesses them, not because they are externally this or that, even as to religious privileges, but insomuch as they fear Him and serve Him according to that light concerning Him which they have, and practise virtue and justice according to their opportunities. A part of their acceptability before God is that it leads Him to view them with favour and guides them on to clearer light, a more full knowledge of Himself and His will, and greater spiritual privileges and means of grace, and if they are already within the range of the covenant, to increase their graces within that range. If they are not yet within it, He leads them, as Cornelius and his friends were now about to be led, into full participation of the blessings of that covenant. This was the case of those good and devout Gentiles, who had already learnt to serve the true God, as that case now presented itself to the eyes of St. Peter, who accordingly begins his address to them with the praise of God for His goodness.

Then he immediately passes to speak of our Lord, the Incarnate Son sent on earth for the salvation of man. "God sent the Word to the children of Israel preaching peace by Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all. You know the Word that hath been published throughout all Judæa"—referring evidently to our Lord's own Ministry in that country —"for it began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached"—for the Apostles seem constantly careful to speak of the intimate connection between the ministry of St. John and that of our Lord. "Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power, Who went about doing good, and healing all that were

oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him," accrediting His preaching and teaching by miracles of benevolence and mercy. "And we are witnesses of all things that He did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem," thus founding the witness of the Apostles, not simply on their knowledge of the Resurrection, but on their previous companionship with our Lord, which had been mentioned as the condition of the Apostolic office by St. Peter himself before the election of St. Mathias.

St. Peter's words read like those of a man full of emotion, who is hardly able to express the deep feeling which overmasters him. He saw before him at last the first-fruits of the Gentiles, for whom our Lord came and died as well as for the Jews. Probably he had longed for the time when it was to be his lot to open to them the gates of the Church, and now it was come. He passes over the Passion in a few words, as a subject which was too full of the most painful thoughts. "Whom they killed, hanging Him upon a tree," these being the words in which the Crucifixion is spoken of in the Old Testament. And then he comes to the Resurrection, the great truth or fact on which the Church was to be built. "Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses preordained by God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose again from the dead." Then he goes on to the commission given to the Apostles, in which is contained the answer to the inquiries of Cornelius and his friends, the statement of what it is that God requires of them. "And He commanded us to

preach to the people, and to testify that it is He Who was appointed by God to be Judge of the living and of the dead." This truth, as to our Lord's Resurrection and as to His appointment to be Judge of the Last Day, is to be received on the word of the Apostles, and thus it is that faith is to be exercised, the condition of salvation. St. Peter speaks to his present audience as to those who would know the truths of natural religion, and thus he puts our Lord before them, in the first place, as the appointed Judge, just as we find St. Paul speaking of Him in his address to the Athenians in the Areopagus. When he speaks, on the other hand, to the Jews, either the people on the Day of Pentecost, or the rulers as when before the Council, he says that God has made our Lord both "Lord and Christ," or "as a Prince and Saviour," and he exhorts them to repentance and faith in Him. But as in the present case it might be supposed that the audience, although composed of Gentiles, was not unacquainted with the Scriptures, St. Peter goes on to mention summarily the witness of the prophets, and then to speak of faith in the Name of our Lord as the condition of the remission of sins, a thought naturally connected with that of the Judgment, the interior witness of conscience being supposed in all. "To Him all the prophets give testimony, that through His Name all receive remission of sins who believe in Him."

The natural sequel, if we may so speak, of this simple instruction of St. Peter, might have been expected to be that Cornelius and his friends would have asked for Baptism, although that sacred rite

had not yet been mentioned by the Apostle. At least they would have professed their readiness to believe, and then would have been baptized. But it pleased God to mark the occasion of the first admission of the Gentiles to the Church, by a most special sign of His favour, and by this to attest in the fullest manner that their admission was His own work. We have heard hitherto of the Holy Ghost falling on the Apostles and on the holy company assembled in the Cenacle on the Day of Pentecost, and in the same way, on the believers afterwards converted. By this descent of the Holy Ghost is meant, not only the interior presence in gifts of sanctifying grace, but also the manifestation of that presence by signs externally perceptible, such as the speaking with new tongues, and the like. But we have heard also how this presence was not vouchsafed to the Samaritan converts until after their Confirmation by the two Apostles sent to them, and it seems generally never to have been vouchsafed until after Baptism. Here, then, was a way in which the absolute freedom of God in the distribution of His great Gift could be manifested in a manner which would raise the occasion before us into something not altogether unlike the conversion of St. Paul, in which our Lord had taken the process, so to say, entirely into His own hands. God acted in His great magnificence, superseding the usual order in which He dealt with favoured souls. "While Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all that heard the Word. And the faithful of the circumcision who had come with Peter, were astonished, for that the grace of

the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnifying God." It has been said above, in the account of the Day of Pentecost, that it is probable that on that day the Apostles and their companions may have spoken in their own language, the words being heard by men of various nations, each in their own tongue. The phenomena, however, of the tongues, of which we hear so much in the *Acts* and in the *Epistles*, need not be limited to this. For it seems likely that on other occasions after Pentecost, those who had the gift really spoke in languages hitherto unknown to them, and to their hearers also, and this may have been the case with Cornelius and his friends.

In any case, God had now declared in the most signal manner what was His will on this occasion. He had not left it to Peter to decide whether he should baptize the Gentiles, for as the Apostle said afterwards, when he explained his action to the Church at Jerusalem, "I remembered the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." He describes the simple reasoning which passed in his mind. "If then God gave them the same grace as to us also who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" The same thought is expressed in the words used by the Apostle, as we are told in the narrative before us, on seeing the manifestations of the presence of the Holy Ghost. "Then Peter answered, can any man forbid water, that they should not be baptized, who have received the Holy

Ghost as well as we?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Then they desired him to tarry with them some days."[5]

St. Luke tells us in the next chapter[6] of the reception in Jerusalem by the Apostles and elders of the intelligence of what had taken place. He uses the same words of the Gentile converts as he had before used of the Samaritans, they "had received the Word of God." He does not say that any surprise was aroused by the act of St. Peter among the Apostles, nor that any one of authority questioned what had been done. This may be accounted for in two ways. The Apostles and the leading disciples as a body may have long been desirous to see the doors of the Church opened to the Gentiles, and thus the act of St. Peter may have been a cause of great satisfaction and rejoicing to them, even though they may have known that every movement in the Church was jealously watched by the Jews outside, that they would certainly be scandalized and provoked thereby, and that it was not unlikely that their narrow feelings might be shared by some among the faithful themselves. Or, in the second place, the prerogatives and pre-eminence of St. Peter may have been so fully recognized, that the simple fact that he had been the agent in what had passed was enough to silence all opposition, even though fault may have been found in his manner of doing what it was his office to do. In any case we must recognize here the first outward intimation of the existence of seeds of dissension

5 Acts x. 1—48. 6 Acts xi. 1—18.

in the Christian body at Jerusalem, seeds which in truth had their origin in the very same feelings of nationality which had been so carefully suppressed some time before by the appointment of the Seven Deacons.

We are on the eve of the first great controversy, and the Apostles, with St. Peter at their head, must have been quite aware of the danger, and anxious to meet it. It was impossible but that there should be a controversy over the admission of the Gentiles to the Church. We may even admit that, in a certain sense, controversies are necessary in the Church, for the development and full examination of the whole Christian doctrine. As we look back over the Christian ages we see the immense gain which has resulted from controversies, by means of which it has constantly been the will of God that the faithful should grasp more perfectly and thoroughly the beauties of Divine Truth, while, at the same time, their existence gives a scope for the labours of the marvellous institution of the Christian doctorate, and brings out the authority of the Church and of the Holy See into a light which might not otherwise have illuminated them. In the present case, there never has been a step taken by the Church and her authorities which has surpassed in importance in the fruitfulness of its consequences, the admission of the Gentiles. It was the dawn of creation to the whole Christian world from that time to this. Another day is to come at the end of the world, when the reconversion of the Jews will rival that act in its grandeur. But as we look forward to this we hardly see in it so much of unexpected-

ness and of mercy, so much of wonderful fecundity, as we see in the conversion of the Gentiles. It was impossible that this can have passed without arousing astonishment.

But if the reception of the Gentiles, from whatever cause, could not in itself be found fault with, the fact that had taken place at Joppe left a number of questions, connected with the position of the new converts, altogether unsettled, and it is on these questions that we hear of the first opposition to St. Peter's action. Just as the vision which had been granted to him at Joppe had referred immediately to the distinction of meats—the great source of the ceremonial principles which rendered communication with Gentile social life abominable—so we find St. Peter criticized, not for admitting the Gentiles to Baptism, but for this communication with them. "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Why didst thou go in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them?" The answer of St. Peter was simple. He did not speak of his own authority, but he related the facts as they have been already stated. And he seems to have silenced his opponents, while there must have been a large number of the faithful, besides the Apostles themselves, to whom what had passed was a matter of the purest joy. "When they had heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, God then hath also given to the Gentiles repentance unto life."[7]

7 Acts xi. 18.

NOTE (to p. 191).

Our Lord's Preaching in Judæa.

In order to give a short summary of the internal evidence for this statement, the following passage is quoted from a volume, now, for the time, out of print.

We have in the first place to justify, as far as may be, the supposition which has been already more than once put forward, that by far the greater portion of the incidents which are included in this portion of St. Luke's Gospel took place in Judæa. Some of the arguments which may be adduced in support of this view have been elsewhere mentioned, such as the evidence of St. Peter in his speech to Cornelius and his friends, which is cited in the Acts of the Apostles, and which therefore comes to us on the authority of St. Luke himself.[1] The statement of St. Peter amounts to an assertion that at some time in the course of His Ministry, and that time subsequent to His preaching in Galilee, our Lord preached throughout Judæa. This might almost have been assumed as a certainty from the nature of the case, but it is distinctly affirmed in the speech in question. But if this be granted, it will certainly be difficult to find any time for it but the time of which we are speaking. But that this was the time, and that the incidents which St. Luke here gives were, in general, the incidents of this course of preaching, is further confirmed by the only other kind of evidence which is available on the subject, that is, by the aid of internal evidence. This evidence is of different kinds, and various degrees of conclusiveness, but when many

[1] Acts x. 37.

such arguments converge, it is difficult to resist their force. Let us enumerate a few such arguments as to the point before us.

The "local colouring," if we may speak of a feature in the narrative the importance of which may certainly be overrated, but is not on that account to be denied—is all in favour of Judæa as the scene of the preaching of this period. St. Luke, as we know, is sparing in his insertion of parables, but those which belong to this time are all Judæan. Such is pre-eminently the Parable of the Good Samaritan,[2] the scene of which lies between Jericho and Jerusalem, while the story relates to a journey from the latter city to the former. Such is the Parable of the Fig-tree in the Vineyard,[3] which, besides its obvious reference to the visits which our Lord had paid from time to time to Jerusalem, is more in place, simply as a picture, in Judæa than in Galilee. Indeed, if we take the parable, as it seems natural to take it, in connection with what we may call the "acted parable" of the blasting of the barren fig-tree, which stands out in so singular a light amid the miracles of our Lord,[4] we may see in the pleading of the gardener for one year's more forbearance, during which he would dig around it and manure it, a significant picture of this very period of missionary labour in Judæa of which we are speaking. For up to this time our Lord had, as it were, come to Jerusalem and Judæa from time to time to see if they would be converted, and now He was to spend the labour of some months in endeavouring to win them to fruitfulness. The Parable of the Lost Sheep[5] is another instance of an image which is, so to speak, much more at home

[2] St. Luke x. 30—37. [3] St. Luke xiii. 6—9.
[4] St. Matt. xxi. 12, 13, 19—22; St. Mark xi. 12—14, 20, 21.
[5] St. Luke xv. 3—7.

in Judæa, a pastoral country, with uplands and mountains on which sheep were largely fed, than in the richer and more agricultural Galilee. It may be remembered also that the many beautiful sayings of our Lord about Himself as the Good Shepherd, sayings which fit into and complete the picture which is sketched in the parable of which we are speaking, were all uttered in Jerusalem itself, as St. John tells us.[6] The same argument as to place may be drawn from the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, who went up into the Temple to pray.[7] In the Sermon on the Mount, which was delivered in Galilee, the synagogues and the corners of the streets are mentioned as the places in which the "hypocrites" prayed ostentatiously, and when the Temple is alluded to in the instruction as to reconciliation with our brother, it is not so much the place of prayer as of sacrifice, which could not be offered anywhere out of Jerusalem. The great Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard[8] is not Galilæan in character, though it may have been delivered in Peræa rather than in Judæa. And the last parable of this time, that of the Lord and his Servants,[9] seems to be taken as to some of its circumstances from what had been done by some of the Herodian princes, who had gone to Rome to be confirmed in their kingdom while the Jews had sent petitions against them to the Emperor.

In the same way, the mention of the Galilæans who had been murdered by Pilate, and the fall of the Tower of Siloe,[10] agrees best with the supposition that our Lord was in Judæa at this time. The same may be said of the visit to Martha and Mary at Bethany.[11]

6 St John x. 1—21.
7 St. Luke xviii. 10—14.
8 St. Matt. xx. 1—16.
9 St. Luke xix. 11—28.
10 St. Luke xiii. 1—5.
11 St. Luke x. 38—42.

It may be said that there are here and there in this part of the Gospel of St. Luke indications of place which do not coincide with our supposition. Thus the mention of Herod, when our Lord is warned by the Pharisees to go thence, because the tetrarch would kill Him, and our Lord's answer that a prophet cannot perish out of Jerusalem, indicate Peræa as the place in which He then was.[12] This is certainly true, but St. Luke again seems to introduce the incident for the very purpose of illustrating His determination to go to Jerusalem. He is on His way thither when the suggestion is made to Him, and He says, in truth, that it will not be in Herod's dominions but in Jerusalem that He must die. [Moreover, it is quite certain that our Lord did preach in Peræa during this time. His visit to Peræa is mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark, and is in no way inconsistent with the supposition which we are maintaining.] In the same way, the mention of His passing along the confines of Samaria and Galilee,[13] when the ten lepers implored His mercy, is introduced, as it seems, chiefly to explain how a Samaritan came to be among them. St. Luke does not seem to mean that the passage between Galilee and Samaria took place immediately after the incidents which precede his mention of it. Thus it is not necessary to imagine any long absence of our Lord from Judæa during this period, though He may probably have returned to Galilee at least once in the interval between the last feast of Tabernacles and the last Pasch.

It is also fair to consider the more frequent and continual presence of the Pharisees and lawyers as putting questions and making objections to our Lord, as another indication that the scene of His teaching at this time was Judæa rather than Galilee. We may

[12] St. Luke xiii. 31—35. [13] St. Luke xvii. 11—19.

add another head of consideration, the conclusiveness of which will be differently estimated by different readers, according to the various views which they habitually entertain of the method of the Evangelists, and particularly of St. Luke. It cannot fail to strike us that St. Luke has inserted in this part of his Gospel, which appears to contain an account of a period of our Lord's teaching which is subsequent to His removal from Galilee, a certain number of incidents which seem identical with what St. Matthew and St. Mark, or both, have selected as happening before that removal. These incidents are, therefore, a considerable difficulty in the way of the harmonist. If they are identical in the narratives of three Evangelists, it becomes unintelligible how they have been allotted by St. Luke to a different time from that in which they are placed by St. Matthew and St. Mark. But, on the other hand, if these incidents in St. Luke are but the repetitions in the Judæan preaching of what had occurred before in the Galilæan preaching—repetitions more or less inevitable under the similar conditions of the two preachings—then their presence where they are in St. Luke becomes easily intelligible, and they furnish an indirect argument in favour of the existence of that Judæan period of preaching which is here supposed.[14]

[14] *The Life of our Life*, vol. ii. pp. 53—57.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENTILES AND THEIR APOSTLE.

No one has spoken more grandly or more enthusiastically about the great counsel of Providence in the vocation of the Gentiles to the Church than the Apostle to whom in a singular manner was committed the execution of that great counsel. We may take up the Epistle to the Ephesians, and consider somewhat leisurely the great passages with which it opens, some words of which we have already quoted in these chapters.[1] After the first salutation, St. Paul begins by blessing God for the ineffable mercy of that vocation. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity, Who hath predestined us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself according to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace in which He hath graced us in His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption through His Blood, the remission

[1] This Epistle, from its very general character, the absence of personal greetings, and other such characteristics, is thought by some to have been an Encyclical Epistle to the Gentile Churches in the whole province of which Ephesus was the capital.

of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which hath superabounded in us in all wisdom and prudence: that He might make known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Him, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, to re-establish all things in Christ that are in Heaven and on earth: in Him, in Whom we also are called by lot, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will, that we may be unto the praise of His glory, we who had before hoped in Christ." Thus far the words have been general, that is, applicable to all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, until he comes to the last sentence, about those who had before hoped in Christ. Then St. Paul goes on to speak of the admission of the Gentiles. "In Whom you also, after you had heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, in Whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of acquisition, unto the praise of His glory. Wherefore I also hearing of your faith that is in the Lord Jesus, and of your love towards all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making commemoration of you in my prayers." Then follow many verses about the subject of his prayers for them. The words in these passages flow on without break, thought after thought rising in the mind of the Apostle, who is too full of his contemplation to pause in pouring himself out.

Then he proceeds to speak more especially of the graces bestowed on the Gentiles. "And you,

when you were dead in your offences and sins, wherein in times past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh on the children of unbelief, among whom also we all conversed," not excepting the Jews as a body, "in time past, in the desires of our flesh, fulfilling the will of the flesh and of our thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, Who is rich in mercy, for the exceeding great charity wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ, by Whose grace you are saved," there being no distinction as to this between Gentile and Jew, "and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that He might show in the ages to come the abundant riches of His grace, in His bounty towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God. Not of works, that no man may glory. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them. For which cause be mindful that you being heretofore Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh, made by hands, that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the conversation," or polity, "of Israel, and strangers to the covenant, having no hope of the promise, and without God in this world. But now in Christ Jesus you, who sometime were afar off, are made nigh by the Blood of Christ, for He is our peace, Who hath

made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities, in His flesh, making void the law of commandments in decrees, that He might make the two in Himself unto one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body by the Cross, killing the enmities in Himself. And coming, He preached peace to you that were afar off, and peace to them that were nigh: for by Him we hath both access in one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God," the dwellers in His home, "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, in Whom all the building framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are built together into a habitation of God in the Spirit."

The Apostle then goes on to speak of his own vocation and commission. "For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ for you Gentiles—if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me towards you, how that, according to revelation, the mystery has been made known to me, as I have written above in few words, as you reading may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ—which in other ages was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and prophets in the Spirit—that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of His promise in Christ Jesus by the Gospel: of which I am made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God, which

is given to me according to the operation of His power. To me, the least of all the saints, is given this grace, to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all men, what is the dispensation of the mystery which hath been hidden in eternity in God, Who created all things, that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places through the Church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him."[2]

This great passage may usefully be compared with others in the Epistles, such as that in the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, where he speaks of "giving thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot," or inheritance, "of the saints in light, Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption through His Blood, the remission of sins, Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature," or all creation, "for in Him were all things created in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and in Him, and He is before all, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the Body, the Church, Who is the Beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the primacy, because in Him it hath well pleased the Father that all fulness

[2] Ephes. i. 8—16, ii. 1—22, iii. 1—12.

should dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of the Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in Heaven." Then again he goes on to speak of the vocation of the Gentiles. "And you, whereas you were sometime alienated and enemies in mind, in evil works, yet now He hath reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unspotted and blameless before Him, if you continue in the faith, grounded and settled and immoveable from the hope of the Gospel which you have heard, which is preached in all the creation that is under Heaven, whereof I, Paul, am made a minister, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh, for His Body, which is the Church, whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given me towards you, that I may fulfil the word of God, the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints, to whom God would make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."[3]

These passages, both probably written about the same time, and certainly during St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, give us an idea of the place which the vocation of the Gentiles and his own appointment as their Apostle occupied in the great eternal plan of the redemption of the world, which he speaks of as the same thing as the reconciliation

3 Coloss. i. 11—27.

of all things to God, whether in Heaven or on earth, the summing up of all things under our Lord as Head, and the like. Some of the expressions used by the Apostle may be directed against the heretical teaching which is said to have been rife at the time in the countries to which the Epistles are addressed, but that does not make the language less true. St. Paul speaks of the eternal predestination of all of us in our Lord, for the accomplishment of which, in the fulness of time, He came to make peace through the Blood of the Cross between God and man, and by His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, obtain for all the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the thrones of Heaven. A part of this counsel is what he calls the mystery hidden from ages and generatoins, namely, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs of the Kingdom with the children of the covenant made with the chosen people, and he says that one of the things which was accomplished on the Cross was the taking away of the middle wall of partition by which the Gentiles were excluded, which consisted in the law of ordinances and the like which our Saviour destroyed by fulfilling it in His death. And he speaks of himself as the appointed minister for the bringing in of the Gentiles into the fold, saying that he has a commission to those to whom he writes, even though he says some of them had never seen him. He speaks of this commission as a special dispensation of God, and of the Gospel as given him by revelation from God. And he speaks of all this as a new revelation to the world through the Apostles and prophets, meaning by this last word the preachers

and missioners of the Church of his own day. He adds also that the whole has been so ordered that God may show the wonders of His grace in the ages to come, and that the Church on earth by her work, her sufferings, her great achievements, will reveal to the principalities and powers in Heaven the "many coloured" wisdom of God. Thus much may be said by way of preface to some few thoughts as to the great mystery before us.

The passages we have quoted might well be used as an illustration of one of St. Paul's characteristics, the manner in which he contemplated and thought out in every direction the truths and acts of God with which he was conversant. Here, however, we must be content to use them as showing us how true it is, that in speaking of the vocation of the Gentiles, we have to deal with one of the very greatest acts of God in His government of the world. We must in the first place remember that such acts naturally require deep consideration and attention if they are to be at all rightly appreciated. The history of the Kingdom of the Incarnation in particular, is the unfolding of the eternal counsels of Him Whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, and Whose judgments are inscrutable. It is therefore a matter of necessity that this history should be full of acts, which no anticipation could have reached, of changes and issues to which no imagination could have soared. But as it is the work of a God of infinite wisdom and grandeur, it is also natural that, when the decisions of His will have been carried out into execution, the result should be seen to be perfectly in harmony with the

general tenour of His providence, and should strike us as almost the single issue which goodness like His could have chosen. Thus we take for granted, in looking back, the obvious reasonableness of the course which He has pursued, and forget all that it had of strange and startling to those who lived at the time of its natural manifestation. Even the works and the discoveries of human genius have often so much beauty and simplicity about them, when they are accomplished, that we are inclined to wonder, rather that the accomplishment was reserved so long, than at the accomplishment itself.

Without going further into these general thoughts, it is enough to point out how strange and unexpected the development of the Gospel history itself must have seemed to the devout Jews of the days in which our Lord lived and suffered. It was not that prophecy had not anticipated it in all its most minute details. Prophecy is a sealed book, as far as the future is concerned, to the greater part of mankind. To say this is not to deny the immense importance of prophecy in the working out of the providence of God. Holy Scripture seems to declare that no element of God's place in the government of the world is omitted in prophecy, as if it were a rule that nothing was to be done unless it had been prophesied. "For the Lord God doeth nothing without revealing His secrets to His servants the prophets.[4] Thus prophecy is in itself a part of the Divine order. Prophecy furnishes a witness and an evidence which can

4 Amos iii. 7.

only be compared in cogency to that of miracles, while it is itself one of the greatest of miracles, and in a certain true sense, the foundation on which the argument from miracles is to rest. This is evident from the constant appeal of our Lord and the Apostles to the prophecies of their own miracles. They refer to them, not simply as miracles, but as signs which have been foretold. Thus even the false miracles of Antichrist will confirm the Christian evidences, because they have been predicted. Yet at the time, perhaps, this will be forgotten. With regard to our own subject, it is not inconsistent with what St. Paul says about the mystery hidden from ages and generations, that there is manifold witness in Scripture to the universality of the redemption and Kingdom of our Lord.

Nor, again, is it to be said that the events of which the Gospel history are made up, especially the sufferings of our Lord and His rejection by the chosen nation, were not in harmony with the requirements of a higher kind of fitness, as becoming the method divinely appointed for the redemption of mankind and the glorification of a great part of the human race, even without the consideration that it had been so foretold by the prophets. It seems as if our Lord appealed or referred to this kind of fitness, as well as to distinct predictions, in His discourse to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus,[5] and this seems also to be in the thoughts of St. Paul in more than

5 St. Luke xxiv. Cf. also St. Luke xxiv. 46, where our Lord seems to distinguish between "thus it is written" and "thus it behoved."

one place, such as that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which he speaks of the consummation of our Lord by His Passion as "becoming" God, when He undertook that glorification of men of which we have spoken.[6] But what becomes God, what is in harmony with the magnificence of His ways and the greatness of His attributes, is above the comprehension of man, until it is revealed by its execution as the beautiful counsel of his Maker and Lord. God's wonderful attributes are displayed in the economy of the Incarnation and of man's redemption thereby, as in no other of His works. But in no other of His works did He so hide Himself before its execution. As St. Augustine says against the Donatists, it seems naturally absurd that the Blood of our Lord should have been shed to save only one set of people in Africa, so it might easily have been reasoned, that God could not mean to become Incarnate and die only for the sake of the Jews. And yet this reasoning might not present itself to many.

What is true of the Gospel history is also true of the history of the Church, which is in truth nothing else than a continuation of the Gospel history on the same lines and under the direction of the same ineffable and marvellous wisdom. We are only now concerned with the history of the first few years of the Christian Church, but the remark holds good of the whole of the Christian centuries. We can see, on looking back, how carefully our

6 Heb. ii. 10. In this passage St. Paul seems to ground the fitness of which he speaks on the omnipotence and majesty of the Creator: "It became Him for Whom are all things," &c.

Lord had prepared the way for what was to come after the day of Pentecost, while at the same time He left so many things unsaid and undone, because it was the counsel of God that they should be said and done by His Church after Him. We can see, in the case before us, how He laid the foundation of the whole doctrine of the admission of the Gentiles to the Church, and of the abrogation of the Jewish law. Yet He Himself would not preach, except to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and made a difficulty about working a miracle for the relief of the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman. We can see also, in reference to the subject with which we are immediately engaged, that many of His words about the last being first and the first last, and the like, may have come back to the minds of the Apostles, when they came to witness, not long after the fall of Judas, the rise, from among the ranks of the bitterest enemies of the Church, of a man almost stained with the blood of the proto-martyr, a man certainly the most prominent among the persecutors of the Church, to a position in the new Kingdom second only to that of St. Peter himself, and to see committed to him a work which filled, in the eyes of his contemporaries, as of the Church since that time, a larger space than that even of the Prince of the Apostles.

And yet, when the rise of St. Paul to so high a throne in the Kingdom of God is looked at in the light of what may be called the Christian philosophy of history, it appears to us perfectly natural, altogether in keeping with the other features in the Divine scheme for the foundation of the Church,

and in a certain sense a necessary element in that scheme, according to the rules of that fitness which we have already seen mentioned by our Lord and by the great Apostle himself. The Apostle of the Gentiles was to her, in this sense, the first of a long line of saints and Christian heroes, who have been raised up from time to time as the Church has needed them. Each age of the Church, and therefore the Apostolic age like the rest, has had its own particular struggles and its victories, its own champions and leaders, martyrs and doctors. These champions were usually extraordinary men, raised up but for a special work, and often adorned by God with great gifts in the spiritual order. Such a man was to be expected for a work like that of which we have been speaking, even if that work had not been of the transcendent importance which actually belonged to it.

The first great novelties in the Providential government of the Kingdom of God were the admission of the Gentiles and the gradual cessation of the obligation of the Mosaic law. These acts were in themselves of unparalleled importance as well as most astonishing to ordinary minds. The truth on which they were founded was the truth of the prerogative of faith as the condition of justification and of admission to the full privileges of the Gospel dispensation, as it had been the condition of similar privileges from the beginning of God's dealings with man. As for this truth itself, and for the great change which its application brought about in the dispensation of God's dealings with the world, they are so simple and natural in themselves that we

wonder now how there can ever have been a doubt about their Divine origin. It was a wonderful stroke of wisdom on the part of God to select a special nation as the depositary of His truths and promises and laws during the long ages of the delay of the Incarnation. Without such a provision, truth and right might altogether have perished out of the earth, as they had almost entirely perished in the ages before the Flood. But in itself the truth and the principle of the universality of God's revelations and mercies seems far more natural than the temporary exclusiveness of the relation of the children of Israel as God's own people. This exclusiveness was more unlike the method of God's Providence than the change by which it was done away. But almost the whole Sacred History was the record of the selection of one nation for the Divine purpose of the preparation of the world for the Incarnation, and all the great promises from Abraham downwards, were made to the Israel of God. The Jewish system had possession of all that was religious in the world. The Jews, as St. Paul says, "were Israelites, to whom belonged the adoption of children, and the glory, and the covenant, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises."[7] The Jews of our Lord's time did not understand the prophecies spiritually, and when the time came for that which was merely temporary to pass away and come to nought, it was natural that the change should arouse astonishment and controversy.

This is the controversy which fills the first age

7 Rom. ix. 4.

of the Church, which occupies the deliberation of the first Council, which furnishes the subject of the first Apostolical decision. It could not be otherwise. Now that we look back, we can take the issue of the controversy for granted. We do not appreciate its unparalleled importance in the execution of the designs of God. It was in truth, as has been said, the execution of one of the most vitally important of His counsels, if we may so measure one against another. The change now made turned the stream of His mercies in a new direction, from a narrow channel into the wide expanse which became an ocean. It altered the whole face of the world from that day to this.

It was not certainly for this controversy alone that St. Paul was given to the Church, but the controversy, with the work with which it was connected, was his peculiar work. It was this that determined the line of his action and the circumstances of his career, as the conflict against the Arian errors occupied the life and determined the work of the great St. Athanasius, and as the disputes which followed on the Arian controversy, determined the lives and work of a score of doctors after him, until the whole doctrine of the Incarnation and of the Person of Christ was finally settled. To us it appears, at this distance of time, a marvel, that the question for the solution of which St. Paul had to labour and suffer so much could ever have been raised. Just so perhaps, it may seem hereafter a marvel to Christians that there could ever have been a doubt raised as to the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady, or as to the Infalli-

bility of the Successor of St. Peter. But there is a beautiful order in the providence of God, according to which truths become unfolded in due course and progress. It is according to our Lord's parable about the seed which is cast into the ground, and springeth up and grows while we know not, "first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear." The sun and the rain and the winds and the ground must do their part, and in the order of Divine truth this part has to be done by thought and discussion and controversy, and, in many cases, even by persecution and heresies. The men of the first age were steeped in Judaism, they loved the Mosaic ceremonies and sacrifices, and the praises and worship of the Temple, and were accustomed from their youth to consider salvation as the peculiar inheritance of the chosen nation, as we now know it to be the heritage of the Universal Church. To the men of that first age what seems to us so plain was not made plain till the Church had spoken. It was not to be found in universal and quiet acceptance till the labours of St. Paul had been spent upon it. As the landscape does not become clear till the sun has risen to enlighten it, so stage after stage of the Divine counsels remain hidden in gloom, until the appointed moment brings the appointed man to execute what God has designed from all eternity, and in the way in which He has designed it.

When we consider the wonderful breadth and magnificence of the providence of God in the vocation of the Gentiles and the temporary reprobation of the Jews, it is not surprising that this work should have been placed in the hands of a Saint especially

selected for it, a Saint whom our Lord destined to one of the very highest thrones in His Kingdom. The work to be done was far more than the simple admission to the Gospel privileges of nations who had not been trained in the traditions of the Jews. It was nothing less than the foundation of the Catholic Church as she has been from that day to this. It is believed that Enoch and Elias are to be sent at the end of the world to bring the Jews back to the fold of our Lord, as if that work were so great as to require messengers of so exalted a sanctity and so special a position in God's Kingdom. The similar work of the formation of the Church out of the Greek and Roman worlds, was one the arduousness of which we, who have reaped its fruits and live upon its success, are the last to be able to understand. It involved a moral and intellectual revolution of very great magnitude both in Jewish and Gentile converts.

Human nature is always one, and it is never well to exaggerate the differences between the mental constitution and formation, so to speak, of races which, after all, were descended from the same parent stock, and whose estrangement from one another could not date back any great number of centuries. All the races descended from Noe and his sons started on their long pilgrimage with the same traditions to enlighten them, and with the same natural law to be their internal guide. But it is undoubted that the western world and the civilized nations which formed the bulk of the Roman Empire, had developed methods of thought and systems of philosophy and culture to which the Jewish mind was more or less

alien. No doubt God could convert, by any instrument He chose to use, the heathen of the most cultivated races. No doubt He could found the whole of the theology and intellectual religion, which was to be the mental food of the world for so many ages, on the teaching of simple Galilæan fishermen to whom the literature of Greece and Rome was altogether unknown. Who can question His power to do this, or whatever else He chooses, for the spiritual and intellectual advancement of the children of the Church, by the instrumentality of any one whom He might appoint? It still remains true that He did not, in His wisdom and condescension, choose this. And, looking back as we do on the history, we may venture to say that it "became" God to do as He did. He chose to commit the conversion of the Gentiles in the largest sense of the word, that is, in the sense of the presentation of the Gospel truth to the Gentile nations in a form and by methods which suited them and were congenial to them, to one who might have by education, and far more, by what may be called the instinct of His genius, a familiarity with the mind of the Gentile world, one who could enter into the struggles of that mind after truth and after God, as those struggles are evidenced to us by the plaintive sighing of their poets and the wayward speculations of their philosophers—one who could discern and gather up the shreds of truth which lay scattered even among their superstitions, and draw their hearts to himself by the sympathy of a mind which loved so much to dwell on the universal Fatherhood of God and on the tender manner in which He had kept up

a witness of Himself both in their own consciences and in the providential Government of His world.

The work which Providence required of this new Apostle was not only the winning of a generation or two of Greek philosophers and Roman thinkers to submit to a new religion, making them first proselytes, and then engrafting the fresh and fuller truths of Christianity upon the Judaism which had been so long working silently and powerfully to prepare the heathen world for the Gospel. The heathen world was prepared for the Gospel by the Jewish communities which were scattered all over it, far more by their higher morality and simpler and loftier notions of God and of human nature, than by the elements in Judaism which dated more particularly from the period of the Mosaic legislation. The heathen heart contained in its recesses the sleeping echoes of the purer traditions which the Jews proclaimed as true. The teaching of the Apostle of the heathen was to quicken to life the all but overwhelmed instincts of conscience, and to rest itself upon the natural law, and the remains of the earlier dispensations under which man had been able to reach forward to God, and even to reconcile himself to Him and to hope in Him. It was to unfold the great principles of God's dealings with His children, and so to light up the whole past as well as to display the promise of the future.

The intellectual character of the Church was involved in the special gifts of the Apostle, through whose mind, so to speak, the truths which our Lord had taught, and the doctrines which were enshrined in His personal actions and in the mysteries of His

life, were to reach the great mass of Christians of all generations. The Apostle was to be, among other things, the father of Christian theology. He was to be the forerunner of Athanasius, and Leo, of Augustine and Basil, of the two great St. Gregorys, of Hilary and Anselm, and Thomas, and of all the schools which were to be taught by them to the end of time. The Apostle was to be the legislator of a whole practical system of government, the forms and principles of which, already deposited by our Lord in the minds of His Apostles, were to be drawn out by exercise, and the perpetual requirements of daily application, into the whole beautiful and complex machinery of the Catholic Church. In this work, as far as it could be done for all time by the founders of the Gentile Churches in the first century, this new Apostle was to have a principal share.

Again, it may have been a strange thought to the first Jewish Christians that the new covenant of God with man was to have its Scriptures as well as the old. They may have thought that the prophecies and their fulfilment in the Person and history of our Lord would suffice. The beginnings of the Scriptures of the New Testament may have sprung from the inevitable necessity, whenever the Apostles separated and death began to mow down the ranks of the immediate disciples of our Lord, of preserving in writing the authentic traditions of His words and actions as related by His chosen witnesses. But it would soon become evident that the daily needs of the multitudinous life of the Church would require doctrinal statements, arguments, reasonings,

practical directions and exhortations which must apply our Lord's principles and the elements of His teaching to a thousand various matters of detail. Thus the Scriptures of the New Testament gradually issued from the mind of the Apostolic band, mostly in the form of Epistles, one from one Apostle, another from another, at different times and places, and on different occasions. But it was natural that the great teacher whom God would give to the Gentile Churches should have a larger share than any other in this part of the Apostolic ministry, and that the necessities of his office while alive should place him, in this respect, in the most prominent position of all in the formation of that Sacred Volume which was to be the storehouse of Christian thought for all ages. Thus it would be that, after the sayings of Jesus Christ Himself, his words would ever be in the mouths of Christian teachers and his thoughts in their minds, when they set forth the religion of our Lord in argument or rose in contemplation to the unfolding of the scheme of our redemption, just as the words and thoughts of David or Mary or Zachary were ever to furnish them with their models of prayer or praise or thanksgiving. These are some few of the manifold offices and gifts which seem naturally to belong to the great saint and teacher who might be selected by God for the work of the Apostle of the Gentiles. And now, who was it that God chose for a work and an office such as this?

The study of Scripture and of history is enough to fill our minds with the providential rule of God's action in the world, of which few have ever spoken

more strongly than St. Paul himself, the rule of the marvellousness and unexpectedness which characterize the execution of the great counsels of God. All history bears witness to the freedom of God's choices in the distribution of His graces and of the vocations which He imparts, bidding one man do this and another man do that according to no apparent law but that of His own inscrutable will. No one is a more conspicuous instance than St. Paul himself of this freedom and large bountifulness of God in the selection of His great instruments, and yet in no case can we more clearly trace the workings of an ineffable wisdom as well as of an unfettered will. As we look upon the work of God after it has been accomplished, it seems even to our poor sight, as if no other choice could have so well carried out the design.

It might certainly have been expected beforehand that the high throne in the Kingdom of the Incarnation which was to be the reward of the labours of the Apostle of the Gentile world, would have been destined to one of the original band of the Apostles of our Lord. It might have been reserved for the Prince of the Apostles himself, a part of whose duty it was to open the doors of the Church alike to Gentile and to Jew. Or it might have been expected that the nomination of the person who was to fulfil so marvellous a mission would have been left, like the election of the successor in the Apostolic College to the traitor Judas, to the body of the faithful, or to the eleven whom our Lord Himself had chosen. But instead of this we find the choice of God falling on one who, though he may have been at Jerusalem

during a part, at least, of the time embraced in the Gospel history, seems never to have seen our Lord in the flesh until He appeared to him from Heaven on the road to Damascus. The choice falls, then, on one who had never heard our Lord teach, who had not wandered with Him over the hills and valleys of Galilee, who had not listened to the Sermon on the Mount, or witnessed the miracles of mercy and power which drew all hearts to Him. What is far more, the choice falls on one who had been brought up in the schools of the Temple at the time when the ruling authorities in Jerusalem were the most active of our Lord's enemies. It is needless to add, that the election of God seeks out one who was not only brought up among our Lord's opponents, but had been himself a cruel and most active persecutor of the infant Church—who had entered heart and soul into the controversy with St. Stephen, who had rejoiced in his apprehension, and had kept the clothes of the witnesses who stoned him.

Nor, again, does the exercise of the Divine independence in the choice of great instruments of Providence, cease with the selection of St. Paul as the object of the wonderful grace of conversion to the Christian faith, under circumstances the most unlikely, and without communication of any kind with the Apostles or the Christian body. It was, indeed, essential that he should receive his baptism, his first sacrament, and the like, from the ministers of the Church in Damascus. But his training for his great office in the dispensation of the Incarnation was not committed to any human teacher. He might have

sat at the feet of St. Peter or St. John, as he had before sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He might have learnt the details of the Gospel history, the character, the sayings, the Life of our Lord, from St. Matthew, or even, like his own companion St. Luke, in great part at least, from the lips of the Blessed Mother of God herself. Nothing of this kind, however, was found in the training of St. Paul. He himself tells us that he received his "Gospel" directly from God, and the context of the passage in which he makes this statement seems to show that it was probably during the years of his retirement in Arabia that he received, by direct revelation, those truths of history and of doctrine with which it was necessary that his mind should be penetrated. This is not the place for any lengthened speculations as to what was the substance of the teaching which St. Paul received directly from Heaven. It is enough to point out that, whatever it was, it was so received, nor did he receive anything in any other way. And in the same way, he himself declares in the passage already referred to, that his Apostolate itself, the highest earthly mission that could be entrusted to any Christian, was conferred upon him by God and not by man.[8] We have already spoken of this. All this points to another feature in the manner of this selection, which must be particularly noted in our endeavour to draw out at least the outlines of the great counsel of God in the manifestation of His predestined instrument.

We have here, in the case of St. Paul, what may be considered as the first instance, in the history of

[8] Galat. i. 2, seq.

the new Dispensation, of a rule of action on the part of God which reminds us most forcibly of a similar rule frequently followed under the older Covenant. As we look back over the annals of the Jewish Church, the heroic figures who tower above all others in the history as having had specially great gifts and commissions, are those of the prophets rather than of the line of priests. The prophets held their office and appointment directly from God, and they arose from time to time, like the great leading Saints of the Catholic Church afterwards, as He thought fit to send them for this or that special purpose. It is true that the prophets founded schools, which seem to have answered in some respects to the religious communities and Orders in the Catholic Church, the greater number of which can trace their origin up to some conspicuous Saint. But these schools of the prophets, or of the "sons" or disciples of the prophets, did not inherit the prophetic office properly so called, nor, when that office was from time to time to be revived, was the person on whom it was to be conferred necessarily selected from these schools. The full idea of the office of St. Paul in the Christian Church embraces far more than the commission which was entrusted from time to time, and for a special purpose, to the successive prophets of the Old Covenant. But it may be said to include such a commission, which was very similar to that for which the great Saints of the Church are from time to time given to her. We find traces, in the history of the prophets, of the arbitrariness, so to speak, on the part of God in the choice of His instruments, which is sometimes carried so far as

to force the prophetical office upon men who seemed themselves most unfit for it, and who were even unwilling to undertake it. But nowhere in the Old Testament could an instance be found of a great enemy of the chosen people, or of the designs of God concerning the world, who was ever roused by grace, not only to desist from his opposition, but to become the greatest of God's instruments for the execution of those designs. The full magnificence of this stroke of grace can only be measured by the loftiness of the office to which St. Paul was raised, and the intensity of will and the fulness of devotion and self-sacrifice with which he carried out its duties. And yet so mighty were the graces which God shed on every side, as it were, on all who were to be concerned in the raising of St. Paul to his predestined position, that we find his vocation acknowledged without hesitation on the part of the rulers of the Church, as soon as they learned the facts of his conversion from St. Barnabas.[9]

In due time, for the exact moment is nowhere noted by St. Luke, St. Paul took his rank among the Apostles themselves. He enjoyed the plenitude of their powers and the extraordinary graces by which those powers were accompanied. He took his place among them by virtue of an order from God Himself, of which they were not the channels though they admitted and recognized it with the utmost frankness. Thus, as regards the Apostles, St. Paul's position in the Church is the first great

9 Acts ix. 27. The contrast between the suspicion with which St. Paul was looked on by the disciples generally and his acceptance by the Apostles is implied by St. Luke.

and most conspicuous triumph of that spirit of charity, and of rejoicing in the exaltation of others, which our Lord had so often inculcated on them when they had been inclined, before the Passion, to contend who should be the greatest. It is the most marvellous proof of that absence from the Apostolic band of the spirit of jealousy and exclusiveness which had been the cause of that fatal opposition to our Lord's teaching and claims, into which self-love had led the Chief Priests of the Jews. His call itself is a declaration that God would continue in the Christian system that exercise of absolute freedom and independence in the granting of the very highest vocations and the most noble missions which had been so often witnessed under the former dispensation. And the manner in which that call was received by the Apostles was a proof that the spirit of the Christian Church, and especially of those highest in authority in her, was to be a spirit of the most perfect reverence for this freedom of God in dispensing His graces, and in choosing the instruments by means of whom His secret counsels were to be worked out. Thus if in the call of St. Paul we see an instance of the law by which God reserves to Himself the highest vocation, and if in St. Paul's wonderful obedience and faithfulness to that call we see an example of the characteristic graces on which the highest sanctity is founded, we also see in the readiness with which he was welcomed by the other Apostles, an instance of the noble and beautiful generosity which has always characterized the Saints in speaking of and dealing with one another, even when, to less perfect virtue, there might be many occasions for jealousy or rivalry.

The next point for consideration in the Apostolate of St. Paul is his preparation for the particular work which the Providence of God had assigned to him. Although a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," as he calls himself, that is, apparently, a Jew by lineal descent, not a proselyte, and although his Pharisaic training and the bent of his mind both made him most extreme as a partisan of the traditions of the elders as well as of the Mosaic Law, he was still, by many circumstances of his preparation, fitted to be in an especial manner the Apostle of the Gentiles. In the first place, he was born among the Jews of the Dispersion, and therefore was perfectly familiar with the Greek language. Moreover, he seems to have been born of parents of sufficiently affluent circumstances to be very highly educated. Tarsus, the place in which his family had settled and where he was born, was one of the three great Universities of the world, inferior only to Athens and Alexandria in the smaller number of pupils who flocked to its schools. This did not prevent the inhabitants, and those who came there for purposes of study, from carrying their literary and intellectual education to great perfection.

Tarsus was a school of teachers. We do not know certainly at what age St. Paul had been sent to study at Jerusalem under Gamaliel. If it was at too early an age to admit of his having a perfect acquaintance with Greek literature and philosophy, this must have been supplied him at Jerusalem, where the school of Gamaliel was largely tolerant of what we should call classical studies. It is certain that St. Paul was well versed in the poets and philo-

sophers. He quotes Menander, Aratus, and Epimenides, and the short epitome of his speech at the Areopagus shows that he was familiar with the various schools of philosophy which are there named by St. Luke. What is more important even than his acquaintance with Greek literature is that his ideas of God's providential government of the world were so large as to transcend the narrow thoughts of the ordinary Jews on that great subject, and in the second place that he could enter fully into the methods of thought and habits of feeling of the Gentile world. This large view of Providence, and of God as the God not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also, cannot be attributed simply to an intelligence of heathen literature and philosophy. But it is not too much to say that such an intelligence was a most useful foundation in a mind like his for an appreciation of the truth. In the same way it would furnish food for that large sympathy with the wants and needs and cravings and failures, the unsatisfied aspirations, the unsuccessful guesses of the heathen mind, all which are included, we may say, in the descriptive words which he uses at Athens, that the Gentiles were left to feel or grope after God, as men who have to find their way in the dark, if perhaps they might find Him, though, as he tenderly adds, He is not far from any one of us.

Whether St. Paul came to Jerusalem already well grounded in heathen literature, or whether he acquired his acquaintance with the ancients there, his residence in that city furnished him with the far more important instrument of a perfect acquaintance with the Sacred Scripture and the Law, as well as

with the traditions preserved by the best schools among the Jews. It was then that he acquired what he never laid aside, using it for the purposes of his own teaching, the knowledge of the allegorical interpretations which were current among the Rabbis, as well as their method of argument by question and answer. But again, far more than that, it was there that his ardent soul drank in the most intense love for the Law, the Temple, the Scriptures, the sacrificial ritual, and the psalmody of the most sacred spot on earth, a devotion to everything sacred and ancient and traditional which he showed at first in his mistaken and exaggerated zeal against all innovation, even when, as in the case of the Christian Law, it was the Divine fulfilment and transfiguration of what was imperfect and typical rather than the destruction of anything that was really holy or valuable. This zeal was, by the mercy of God, soon ennobled and transformed into the deepest love for the Christian system, the truth and not the figure, the substance and not the shadow, just as his earnest love for his nation and his brethren after the flesh passed into the love of the Catholic Church and her children everywhere. And again, when we consider that the particular work confided to St. Paul involved no less an issue than the supplanting of the Law of Moses by its fulfilment in the Gospel, we can see that his great love for his nation and all that belonged to it, made his witness against the exclusiveness of the Judaizers of his time all the more irresistible, while the enmity which gathered over his head as a so-called apostate was so great as almost of itself to force him to address himself to

strangers, and to make him acceptable to them as the champion of their religious freedom.

Such may be said to be some of the external circumstances in the life of St. Paul which may have had their share in preparing him for the great work for which God designed him. But we must remember that this is but the human side of the preparation of the Apostle. He speaks in his Epistles of God having chosen and separated him from his mother's womb, and these words must not be understood simply in a general sense, as similar words might be used of any one who is intended by God for some special work in His service. St. Paul's words seem to mean that he was conscious of many particular acts of Providence, many special interior favours, many instances of guidance or correction or protection which had helped to lead him on in the path along which God meant him to walk. And to these must be added the very singular and almost unparalleled favours bestowed upon him in and at his conversion, and during the rest of his life. One who had received his Gospel, as he says, as well as his Apostolate, by revelation, one who had been at a later time caught up into Heaven and heard the unspeakable words which it is not lawful for man to utter, one who was so continually favoured with other supernatural visitations, must have had a mind enlightened and a heart inflamed and enlarged thereby to an extent which must have fitted him for any work, however arduous and difficult. He was a vessel of election, not because of his natural qualities, or his education, or his history, not because he knew the Gentile mind and was a Roman citizen,

though God, Who orders all things sweetly, condescended to use these external circumstances in the carrying out of the counsel of His mercy. He was a vessel of election, because it pleased God to make him so, by a series of graces and visitations which have been seldom paralleled in their number and their magnificence.

We have of course but few and fragmentary indications of the wonderful treasures of knowledge and wisdom with which the mind of the great Apostle was stored, but these scanty traces are enough to show us how wonderful must have been his gifts in this respect. We have a few speeches in the Acts, but the longest of them are those which are occupied by his narrative of his own conversion. The speech at Lystra in Pisidia, and the speech at Athens, are very precious in another way. Besides these, we have the fourteen Epistles. These are altogether what may be called occasional, drawn from the mind of the Apostle by the pressing needs of the Christians to whom they are addressed. The Epistle to the Hebrews belongs to the same category, although it has more the appearance of a formal treatise than any other book of the New Testament. It is obvious that the purpose which was immediately before the mind of the writer guided his pen all through, and that in these Epistles we have only what St. Paul thought it well to say to the persons whom he was addressing under practical and incidental difficulties. He might have written ten times as many Epistles in the same way, without having occasion to touch the most important points as to doctrine, or as to the constitution of the

Church, and other general matters of the highest moment. And yet, notwithstanding this, we find in the Epistles of St. Paul a store-house of Christian theology which is unique among the possessions of the Church, if we except the Gospels themselves, in which the life and teaching of our Lord are preserved to us.

Indeed, it is not easy to find a point of Christian truth on which St. Paul has not spoken, and his teaching is as fresh and as applicable to the needs and questionings of our own day as to those of the days in which he lived. He has spoken of the creation of the world, of the design of God in that creation, of the summing up of all in the Sacred Humanity of our Lord. He has brought out into full light the unity of the human race, and the effects of the fall of Adam, not only on his own posterity, but on the whole universe, of which he was the appointed lord. He has told us how death came into the world as the consequence of sin, and of the penalty of the "subjection of the creature unto vanity" which was incurred in consequence. He has brought out the resemblance and the contrast between the first and the second Adam in the work of which each has been the author for mankind. He has brought out also the truth that from the beginning faith was the condition by which men were able to please God. He has explained by what it was that, when the truths of religion and the promise of redemption, which had been made to our first parents in Paradise before their ejection after the Fall, were to be confided after the Flood to a chosen race of whom the Redeemer was to be born,

Abraham obtained by the grace of God that he and his children should be the heirs of the promise and the custodians of the truth.

He has summed up in a few glowing words the privileges of the chosen people, and the blessings which they secured when the Mosaic law was given to them, by which salvation might have been gained if any law, as such, could be the means of salvation. He has explained the true value of the Law, "as a pedagogue to bring us to Christ," the typical character of its sacrifices and priesthood, and the manner in which it has been fulfilled and its obligations taken away by our Lord. These may be said to be truths the declaration of which belonged rather to those times than to the times in which we live, but the manner in which they are set forth giving them a perpetual and living importance. The same may be said of the wonderful passages in which the Priesthood of Christ and the Atonement wrought by Him are put forward in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

At the same time, if we are in search for an account of the miseries of heathenism, and the state to which it had brought the world, we find St. Paul instructing us most fully in the Epistle to the Romans. It is not merely that he describes heathenism in the famous passage in the first chapter. Few as his words are, they are enough to tell us how heathenism began, how it was a punishment on forgetfulness of God and neglect of natural light and the natural law, and elsewhere in a word or two he has told us how the evil spirits had got themselves worshipped as the idols of the pagan religion. But he has also drawn for us the picture of the goodness

of God, never forgetting or abandoning His creatures or leaving Himself without witness, supplementing by His kindly Providence the teaching concerning Himself which was to be gathered from the universe which He had created, as well as from the interior voice of conscience supporting the natural law by its praise of good, and its blame of bad, always accompanied by an implied promise or threat of retribution. And then he declares himself commissioned to declare to all the world that the times of God's longsuffering inaction are at an end, and that He has appointed a day and a Judge for that universal account which every man instinctively feels that he is bound to render to Him as a Master and Lord. "It is appointed to man once to die, and after this the Judgment."

It is of course on the subject of the Redeemer of the world and the work accomplished by Him that we should naturally expect to find St. Paul most copious and eloquent. The history of Redemption is told us in the Gospels. The theology is taught us by St. Paul. The Incarnation, the Divine Person of our Lord, His Godhead and His Sacred Humanity, His example, His teaching, His character, and more especially the great mysteries, His Passion under a hundred aspects, His Resurrection and its effects as the ground and cause of ours, His work in the world below, His Ascension and its results in the Mission of the Holy Ghost, and in His reign at the right hand of the Father,—on these he dwells wherever he has an opportunity, with all the intenseness of love and devotion which might be expected of one to whom our Lord had shown the

unique favour of converting him Himself, and making him an Apostle by personal revelation. The truths which he has set forth as to these great mysteries, if properly developed, constitute a whole system of theology. So it is with the means of grace and justification, with God's action in all these, and the part which He expects of man. He is particularly full in his development of the love of our Lord for the Church, and her relations to Him as His Spouse, born like Eve, from His Side while He slept in death. He is the Apostle who has drawn out for us the doctrine of the Church as the Body of our Lord, in which is contained all that has ever been taught as to the unity, mutual interdependence, and subordination of the various ranks and classes in the Church.

He has drawn out also the truth of the Blessed Sacrament, and, indeed, has sketched in principle the whole sacramental system as well as that of the Christian Hierarchy, the dignity of marriage as well as the superior beauty of virginity, the fruitful doctrine of penitential satisfaction and the immense value of suffering, the doctrine of Purgatory as well as the ineffable and inconceivable joys and glories of Heaven, our hope for the Christian dead as well as our duty of succouring them, the value of good works of mercy and charity, as well as the irresistible power of prayer. He is so full of Christian truths, that when he checks the Thessalonians as to their anticipation of the speedy coming of the end of the world, he tells them in a few words almost all that can be told about Antichrist, and while he explains the sublime doctrine of the action of God

in the reprobation of the Jews, he teaches us also how glorious may be the victory when at last they are converted. "Blindness in part hath happened in Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles is come in." "By their offence, salvation is come to the Gentiles, that they may be emulous of them. Now if the offence of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more the fulness of them? . . . For if the loss of them be the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

If St. Paul seems, as has been said, to penetrate the future history of the world, it is true also to say that he seems to have had before him as an ideal not quite yet to be fulfilled, the beautiful work of the Church in the regeneration of the family, domestic life, and even in the relations which may be called social and political. He never seems so happy as when, at the end of his Epistles, when he has done with the controversial or practical questions which have induced him to write, he turns to exhorting his disciples to Christian perfection in their mutual relations as parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, pastors and the flock committed to their charge. He deals most prudently with the question of slavery, and one of his most characteristic letters is that to Philemon, sent by the fugitive slave whom he had converted in Rome, and whom he enjoined to return to his master. It is St. Paul who has seen in our Lord's words to Pilate, about the power given him from above, the doctrine of the Divine basis of all civil

power and authority, and who has enforced this doctrine in words which many modern Christians and Catholics are by no means disinclined to wish unuttered. He gives to Antichrist the name of the "lawless one." He evidently looks forward to what could not be as yet in his days, the practice of holy virginity as a regular institute in the Church, the celibacy, not only of bishops and clergy, but of thousands of the faithful laity. He utters words which contain the great principle of mortification, expiation, and reparation for the sake of the Church.[10]

But where should we end if we were to go on drawing out the hints which may be gathered from his writings as to the depth and riches of the mind of St. Paul? These utterances of his are but rays of light which stream to us from a greatly overclouded sky, in which there are some few rifts in the dark canopy which hides from us all its glories. St. Paul had no time to write out his thoughts on any great subject, much less to lay open the whole range of truth, on which those thoughts habitually dwelt, and when what he has uttered in this partial manner is so comprehensive and so glorious, what should we say if we could see the whole? Now and

[10] The passages referred to in this short sketch of St. Paul's doctrine are as follows: Heb. xi. 3; Col. i. 15—19; Acts xvii. 26; Rom. v. 12—19; Rom. viii. 20—23; Heb. xi. 6; Rom. iv. 9—22; Rom. ix. 4, 5; Rom. iii. 1, 2; Gal. iii. 21; iii. 24; Heb. iii. iv. vii. viii. ix.; Rom. i. 18—32; 1 Cor. x. 20; Acts xvii. 30, 31; Heb. ix. 27; Ephes. v. 22, 29—32; 1 Cor. xii. 12—31; 1 Cor. xi. 23—30; 1 Cor. vii. 25—38; 1 Cor. iii. 14, 15; 2 Thess. ii. 3—12; Rom. xi. 25; iv. 15; Rom. xiii. 1, 2; Col. i. 24. In cases where the references would be too numerous, as with the Apostle's doctrine concerning the Passion, they have been omitted.

then, on a few occasions, he seems to let himself flow on on some great subject, as when he speaks of the heathen world, or of the love of God to us in our Lord, or of the destiny of creation when regenerated, or of the glories of the Resurrection, or of the might of the power of God in the panoply with which the priests may arm themselves, or of the work and duties and perils and sufferings of the Christian ministry, or of the triumphs of faith, and the like. But the floodgates are soon closed, though what has thus issued from them shows us how much more there must have been which has been kept back.

It is but little indeed that we can guess of the vast illumination of the minds of the chosen saints of God. It may be that what has been said of St. Paul might be equally true of others of the Apostolic body, and it would be foolish indeed to conclude that, even in the knowledge possessed by his intelligence after the special revelation made to him, and after he had been caught up into Heaven, he surpassed the Beloved Disciple who lay on our Lord's bosom, or the Prince of the Apostles himself. But what is peculiar to St. Paul is that we trace in all these gifts the special armoury of knowledge which belonged to him as the Apostle of the Gentile world. His was the mind through which, in the main, the treasures of Christian doctrine have passed to the Gentile Church, and thus the great Doctors both of East and West, the Fathers who fought for the truth in the first centuries after the conversion of the Empire, their successors in the following ages, the great Schoolmen and

lights of Christendom, down to our own time, may be called in a most true sense the intellectual children of St. Paul. And if this is true of the great Doctors and teachers of Christendom, it must be true of those who have been in turn their scholars, and thus his paternity extends to all Christians, whether highly or poorly educated, to all succeeding generations until the end of time. We thus get some faint intelligence of the work which God had done when He sent forth the Apostle of the world from his temporary retirement in Arabia.

It may be natural to think that the silence and conciseness of St. Luke omits a great deal with regard to the commission entrusted to St. Paul. It may be supposed that when St. Barnabas went to St. Peter and the rest, and told them "how our Lord had appeared to him by the way," a good deal more was communicated to them, either by him, or in some other way, as to the unexampled magnitude of the graces which had been bestowed upon St. Paul, and his destination for his especial work. St. Paul tells us that he then dwelt with St. Peter for fifteen days, and he speaks as if the chief object of his visit to Jerusalem were to converse with him. It cannot be unreasonable to think that St. Peter, either then, or at some other time, was made aware of the great designs of God in the conversion of St. Paul, and that he understood perfectly that he had received the Apostolate in a way which made him almost his own twin brother in all, except as to those privileges which our Lord Himself had conferred upon him. What St. Peter knew he could

communicate to others, as St. John and St. James, nor was it necessary that St. Paul should tell his story to others except to him. But however deep may have been the intelligence of the Apostles as to the wonderful act of God's Providence which had taken place, we may believe that it was transcended in fulness and clearness by that which lit up the mind of the Blessed Mother of our Lord, so familiar from her earliest years with the contemplation of God's magnificence. But we may reserve our thoughts on this subject until we have to read further the history of the development of the great work committed to him in the career of St. Paul.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST MISSION TO THE HEATHEN.

After speaking of the immediate sequel to the admission of Cornelius and his companions to the Church by St. Peter, in the objection made to the Apostle after his return to Jerusalem, and the explanation given by him of the circumstances, which entirely satisfied the objectors, at least for the time, St. Luke goes on to mention, in words which have been already quoted, what had happened meantime in his own city of Antioch. We may suppose that when at first the disciples, scattered by the persecution which arose after the death of St. Stephen, carried the word of God into that great capital, the preaching was addressed only to the Jews or their proselytes. Subsequent to this, it seems well to place, what St. Luke does not mention, the arrival of St. Peter at Antioch, where, according to all Christian tradition, he fixed his Chair. After the Apostle's departure, but we do not know how long after, we may place the second stage of the preaching at Antioch, mentioned by St. Luke, when the men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke the word to the Gentiles also, and a great multitude became converts. This was after the conversion of St. Paul, and, probably, though we do not know it certainly, after the admis-

sion of the Gentiles to the Church by St. Peter at Cæsarea. St. Luke then tells us that the Apostles at Jerusalem, hearing what had taken place at Antioch, sent St. Barnabas to that city, "who, when he was come, and saw the grace of God, rejoiced, and he exhorted them all with purpose of heart to continue in the Lord, for he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And a great multitude was added to the Lord." This was also after St. Paul's return from Arabia, his visit to Damascus, his going up to Jerusalem to see St. Peter, the plot against his life, and his return to his own country at Tarsus. It may be assumed also that he preached for awhile in Cilicia. But St. Luke tells us that St. Barnabas, finding, perhaps, the work at Antioch too much for himself single-handed, or more probably, aware of the special destination of St. Paul for the preaching to the Gentiles on which he was himself now engaged, went to Tarsus to seek St. Paul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. "And they conversed there in the church a whole year, and they taught a great multitude, so that at Antioch the disciples were first named Christians," the name being probably given them by common usage to distinguish them from the Jews. Thus silently and quietly was St. Paul introduced into the work to which the remainder of his life was to be given. This, however, was but the first stage of his career among the Gentiles, for it was confined to the Greeks in one great city, many of whom were probably already well acquainted with the Jewish religion. It was not yet a missionary conquest of a country mainly pagan.

The next incident in the narrative shows us St. Paul again at Jerusalem, although his stay there could not have been long. St. Luke, who is abundantly confirmed by other authors where his facts admit of such a confirmation, tells us, that at the end of the year from St. Paul's arrival, the Christians at Antioch were inspired to send a charitable offering of alms to the poor Church at Jerusalem and in Judæa. "And in those days there came down prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch," that is, it seems, preachers of the Gospel, some of whom had the gift of prophecy, "and one of them named Agabus, rising up, signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over the whole world, which came to pass under Claudius. And the disciples, every man according to his ability, resolved to send relief to the brethren who dwelt in Judæa, which they also did, sending it to the ancients by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

We must not linger over this charitable mission, which shows how naturally the instinct of brotherly love manifested itself in the new converts. Long before St. Paul had laid down the doctrine about the union of Christians one with another, as the different members of the body are united, so that if one suffer all the members suffer with it, the principle of unity in the Church was thus practically acknowledged. We know how, later on, the last journey of St. Paul to Jerusalem of which we have any record, was undertaken partly, if not mainly, for the purpose of carrying thither the alms of the Gentile Churches of which he had been the father. This was the one condition, as he tells us, which was

suggested to himself and Barnabas by the elder Apostles, James, Cephas, and John, "who seemed to be pillars," "that they should be mindful of the poor." But the arrival of the ambassadors of charity at Jerusalem found the Church there in great trouble. Herod Agrippa, who by the favour of Caligula had been named King, first of one part of the old dominions of his grandfather and then of others, had come to Jerusalem, and either from policy or from strong Jewish prejudices, had vigorously followed a line of persecution against the Christians which was likely to make him very popular with a great part of the nation. He had already put St. James the Great to death, and had cast St. Peter in prison, intending to have him executed as soon as the feast of the Pasch was over. The day of execution was very near at hand. St. Peter was looking forward, as it seems, to his martyrdom. Meanwhile, "prayer was made without ceasing by the Church to God for him." The words imply that the solemn prayer was never allowed to cease, one set of worshippers succeeding to another without intermission, as when, in the modern devotion of the Forty Hours, or for the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday night, care is taken that the worship and prayer shall be uninterruptedly kept up.

At first sight the narrative of St. Luke, in which he relates first the miraculous deliverance of St. Peter from his chains, and then the death of the persecuting King, seems to be inserted because it so happened that St. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem about that time. It is more reasonable to

think that St. Luke was guided here also to give an account of events which belong to the class of typical features in the history of the Church. Some eminent saint, a man whose life is of the greatest value to the Church, is in imminent danger under the persecution, and when all human ways of escape seem to be shut off, deliverance comes miraculously, or at least marvellously, after the Church has set her children earnestly to the seeking help in prayer. Moreover, this may be considered as an instance of the many preternatural interpositions which have occurred, from time to time, for the protection from imminent danger of the Supreme Pontiffs of the Church. Nor does St. Luke go out of his way, in relating the death which providentially cut short the career of the reckless adventurer, Herod Agrippa, merely, as it might be supposed, to sound a note of triumph over the fall of an enemy of the Church. The chastisement which fell upon Herod is an example of what so frequently occurs in God's dealings with open persecutors, when they either lose their power and are humbled in the dust, or die suddenly in the heyday of their apparent success. It was well that the sketch of Church history which is given us in the Acts should not be without this feature of the sure and swift judgment which falls on so many of those in power who lift their hands against her. We have seen how the persecution which raged after the death of St. Stephen was the dawn of a new era of activity and expansion on the part of the Church. It is in keeping with this characteristic of her life in the world that, as we are told by some historians, the "other place" to which,

as St. Luke says, St. Peter went after his escape from the chains of Herod, was no less than Rome itself, the capital of the Empire of the Cæsars. For Apostles and Apostolic men, after Providence has delivered them from some imminent danger, are strengthened and encouraged by their deliverance to undertake new enterprises and to brave new dangers, out of gratitude to the mercy shown them, and in greater reliance than before on the protection of God.

The history now leads on to what may be called the second great step in the execution of the counsel of God for the conversion of the Gentile world. The first stage may be said to have been characterized by two great acts, the conversion and preparation of St. Paul, and the formal admission of Cornelius and others to the Church by St. Peter. The first was the furnishing to the Church the predestined instrument for the great work which was to change the face of the world. The second was the solemn and authoritative act by which the earthly head of the Church opened her doors to the Gentiles, as he had opened them on the Day of Pentecost to the Jews. But, up to the time at which we have arrived, there had been no distinct mission to the heathen, nor had St. Paul been put forward as their appointed Apostle. It is clear that there must still have been much questioning as to the conditions on which the Gentiles were to be received, and which had not as yet been settled by authority. And it is clear also that there must have been still a considerable party, even in the Church itself, who were ready to take the strict Jewish view on this subject, and to make

the Mosaic Law an essential door through which those outside must enter the Church of our Lord. The perfect solution of this latter question, as far as authority could settle it, was to come later. For the present we have to consider the former step, that is, the destination of special missioners to the heathen as such.

St. Luke tells us, after his account of the death of Herod, that "the word of the Lord increased and multiplied," new vigour being given to the exertions of the Church after the death of the persecutor. He adds that "Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem having fulfilled their ministry, taking with them John, whose surname was Mark." No long time could have been required for the delivery of the alms of the Christians of Antioch to the authorities of the Church in Jerusalem, and it is probable that the visit was soon passed. The two envoys were the chief workers in the great city from which they came, and must have been anxious to return to the field of their labours. The Evangelist, who must have been at Antioch at this time, gives a list of the teachers and preachers in the city—"prophets and teachers, among whom was Barnabas, and Simon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manahen who was the foster-brother of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul." It is probable that they had already high aspirations as to more venturesome efforts for the conversion of the heathen. When once the door had been opened, the vast field which lay before the workers of the Church must have filled all apostolic souls with enthusiasm. What were Cornelius and his friends, what were the multi-

tudes who had joined the Church in the metropolis of the East, to the thousands on thousands of souls for whom our Lord had died all over the world, whose angels were now looking wistfully for the arrival among them of Christian missioners? The fields were indeed white unto the harvest. These aspirations must have been especially ardent in a heart like that of St. Paul, who had received from our Lord Himself the special commission to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. Several years had passed since that apparition on the road to Damascus, and in the meanwhile he had been wonderfully enlightened and strengthened by Divine gifts. He had seen too that the doors of the Church had been thrown open to the Gentiles by the Chief Pastor of the Church, and that probably in several places there were already Christian communities of which the Gentiles formed a considerable part. He had communicated with St. Peter, and we must suppose that the Prince of Apostles had greatly encouraged him and recognized his Apostolate. The work was ready, the door was open, and the chosen man was there. Yet St. Paul did not put himself forward. He waited as David had waited after his anointing by Samuel, until Providence arranged the beginning of his great mission. The desires and wishes of the Church were embodied in prayer, which brought down from Heaven the special guidance of the Holy Ghost.

"And as they were ministering to the Lord, and fasting, the Holy Ghost said to them, Separate me Saul and Barnabas, for the work whereunto I have taken them." The word which is rendered ministering is the word which is properly applied to the

solemn services and Sacrifice of the Church, and we have thus a picture of some special time set apart for obtaining the guidance of Heaven by using the most efficacious kind of prayer united to fasting. There were in those early times many different ways by which the Holy Ghost communicated His guidance, besides the interior inspiration in which He ordinarily speaks. Thus the Divine answer may have been given by the mouth of some Saint, or by the same interior inspiration moving the hearts of a number of the suppliants at once. The answer practically came to this, that St. Paul and St. Barnabas were chosen as the instruments of Heaven on this occasion. The special work is not mentioned, nor the particular direction which the path of the two Apostles was to take. For it seems likely that the design of a missionary journey had long been before the minds of the chief teachers of the Church in Antioch, and the choice of the places in which the preaching was to be undertaken might be left to their own prudence.

The history of this memorable journey is contained in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the Acts. It was a further and a great step in advance towards the conversion of the heathen, no only in itself, in the number of converts made and of churches founded, but also in bringing to the front the great question, which it was now necessary to settle, as to the conditions to be imposed on the Gentile converts with regard to the observance of the Mosaic Law. After the return of St. Paul and St. Barnabas to Antioch, with the account of their success and of the manner in which God had

cooperated with them by miracles, it became absolutely necessary for the partisans, as we must call them, of the Law of Moses, either to insist on its observance by the heathen or to abandon their advocacy of that observance. Thus this becomes the most memorable missionary journey ever made in the Church, and we can well understand that its importance must have made St. Luke anxious to give a full account at least of its chief incidents. It will be enough for us to point out those which may be considered as such.

The Apostles, with John Mark as their assistant, first took their course to Cyprus, which lies almost directly opposite the mouth of the Orontes, the river which flows through Antioch. The port of Seleucia, where they took ship, is some miles north of the mouth of the river. Cyprus was the native country of St. Barnabas, and this may have determined the course of the Apostles, especially as John Mark was his nephew, and thus likely to find, as well as his uncle, many relatives and friends in the island. They landed at Salamina, the port nearest to the Syrian coast, and went all through the island to Paphos, which lies at the western end. Here they found a willing listener in the proconsul, Cyprus being then a senatorial province. His name was Sergius Paulus, a man of some distinction as a student, of active mind and large acquirements. He was much under the influence of one whom St. Luke calls a "wizard" or magician, Elymas, also called Bar-jesus, who appears to have mixed up the true doctrines of Judaism with the baser elements of pretended supernatural powers, something after the manner of Simon

Magus. Sergius Paulus seems soon to have discerned the truth of what was true in the teaching of Elymas, and to have gone beyond the intention of his teacher in using it as an unconscious preparation of his mind for the full revelation of the Gospel. He sent for the Apostles, and his step was naturally opposed by the impostor. St. Paul, who is now for the first time called by the name by which we know him, sternly rebuked Elymas, who was struck with blindness in the presence of the proconsul, whose inclinations towards the faith were ripened by the miracle into full submission.

From Cyprus St. Paul and St. Barnabas passed to the opposite coast of Pamphylia, and sailed up the Cestus to Perge, the capital, some few miles from the sea. We hear nothing of their doings here, and perhaps their object was to penetrate further inland at once. It was here, however, that John Mark, seemingly frightened at the danger of entering an entirely heathen country, left them and returned to Jerusalem. The Apostles proceeded into Pisidia, and made their way to the capital, called Antioch. There also they found a colony of Jews, and it was in the synagogue of Antioch that St. Paul delivered his first sermon of which we have any record. It is extremely interesting, as showing us the line of argument which he now took with the Jews.

The arrangements of the Jewish synagogues admitted very freely strangers of their own nation, who had any claim to authority or rank, who were permitted to take that part of the service which answered to our sermon, and was usually a discourse

founded on an explanation of the portions of the Law and the Prophets which were read in regular order on successive Sabbaths. St. Paul, and perhaps St. Barnabas also, had been a member of the Sanhedrin, and held probably the rank of rabbi. There was therefore nothing unusual in the two strangers taking their seats on the bench allotted to those who were ready to speak, and when the due time came, "after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them saying, Ye men brethren, if you have any word of exhortation to make to the people, speak." St. Paul's speech has something in common both with the speech of St. Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and with that of St. Stephen when before the Council. He begins like St. Stephen historically, and brings the history of the chosen people down to David. We must suppose that the speech as reported to us is a simple analysis or skeleton, filled out doubtless with great earnestness and eloquence by the Apostle. In the historical part we catch an echo of St. Stephen's vehement reproaches against the people, where St. Paul says that God "endured their manners for forty years in the desert," and that after the period of the Judges they desired a King, on which God gave them Saul, and afterwards David, the "man according to His own heart." From David he passes to our Lord, raised up of the seed of David, according to God's promise, as a Saviour. He then speaks of the rejection and crucifixion of our Lord as the work of the people and rulers at Jerusalem, and then announces His Resurrection, and the appointment of the Apostles as witnesses thereof to the

people. He confirms what he has said by appealing to the prophecies of this great mystery, quoting especially the Psalms, and proving that the great words in which the Resurrection was foretold could not apply to David himself. In this he resembles St. Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost. He then proclaims to his audience that forgiveness of sins is offered to them through our Lord, and ends by warning them strongly against rejecting the message, "lest that come upon you which is spoken in the Prophets, Behold ye despisers and wonder and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which you will not believe, if any man should tell it you." It is remarkable that St. Paul claims their faith, simply on the testimony of the Apostles to the Resurrection, supported by the prophecies, and that we are not told of any miracle by which he had impressed his own authority as from God upon them. Yet he warns them as strongly as we have seen against the danger of unbelief. The discourse was addressed not only to the Jews, "Ye men of Israel," but also to the devout Gentiles who frequented the synagogue, "and you that fear God, give ear." It is remarkable, in another way, that St. Paul seems to refer in the speech to two portions of Scripture which were read on the same Sabbath day in the synagogues, one from the Law, and the other from the Prophets, as a preacher now might refer in his sermon to the Epistle and Gospel of a Sunday.

But the most remarkable feature in this discourse is perhaps the distinct assertion, now made for the first time in any Apostolic utterance of which we

have record, that the Law of Moses was insufficient for justification, and that justification is by faith. If we suppose that the few words of St. Luke's report were expanded and insisted upon in the actual sermon, we may see here not only the first note of a strain which St. Paul was afterwards to dwell upon with continual fulness, but also a declaration about the Law which must have been very novel indeed to the Jews of that time. "Be it known to you, therefore, men brethren, that through Him, Christ Jesus our Lord, forgiveness of sins is preached to you, and from all the things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses, in Him every one that believeth is justified." St. Peter had already laid down that justification was to be had on the condition of faith in our Lord, without making any mention of the Law, and St. Stephen had reproached the Jews for not keeping the Law, which they had received by the disposition "or ministration" of angels, but he had said nothing against what St. Paul afterwards came to call "the works of the Law." It was probably this part of the speech of St. Paul before us which stirred so fiercely the enmity of the Jews at Antioch, although it need not be doubted that the great success and popularity of the Apostles had a great share in provoking them to violence.

St. Luke's account of the issue of the preaching is as follows, "And as they went out, they desired that on the next Sabbath day they would speak these words to them. And when the synagogue was broken up, many of the Jews, and strangers that served God, followed Paul and Barnabas, who

speaking to them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. But the next Sabbath day, the whole city almost came together to hear the Word of God." This was too much for the Jewish teachers, who were probably in high esteem among the better classes of the inhabitants, and revered and honoured as religious guides. "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicted those things that were said by Paul and Barnabas, blaspheming." Apparently they spoke against the name of our Lord. "Then Paul and Barnabas said boldly, To you it behoved us first to speak the Word of God, but seeing you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord hath commanded us. "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth." And the Gentiles hearing this were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed. But the Jews stirred up religious and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out of the city. And they shaking off the dust of their feet against them, came to Iconium, and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." The Jews, for the time, were able to move the most respectable classes among the inhabitants, and the Apostles were therefore warned by our Lord's injunction to treat Antioch as a city which would not receive them. They obeyed to the letter this injunction, which must have come to them by tradition, unless

the Gospel of St. Matthew was already written. St. Paul may have received his knowledge of this as of other details of our Lord's preaching by revelation. They passed on to another city, leaving the disciples whom they had made in Antioch to the care of God, perhaps also having made some beginning towards the ecclesiastical organization of the little community. "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost."

The Apostles next went to Iconium, some sixty miles on the road towards Ephesus, plunging, therefore, still more and more into the heart of the peninsula of Asia Minor. Here also "there was a synagogue of the Jews, in which they so spake, that a very great multitude both of the Jews and Greeks did believe." But the unbelieving Jews stirred up and incensed the minds of the Gentiles against the Apostles. Here may have begun that method of opposition which consisted in denouncing the Christian teachers as subverters of the public peace, and the like. The appeal was not now to the "religious and honourable women," but to the Gentiles, as such. Nevertheless, the Apostles persevered. "A long time therefore they abode there, dealing confidently in the Lord, Who gave testimony to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." The details of their miracles are passed over in silence, and the narrative evidently may cover many very remarkable miracles and conversions. St. Paul had already made the acquaintance of St. Timothy, the child of a mixed marriage, his father being a Gentile, and his mother a Jewess. Timothy had been most

devoutly brought up, and the devotion of his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, are specially mentioned in the Second Epistle addressed to him by the Apostle, who mentions in the same letter that he had been witness to the afflictions and persecutions which fell upon him at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. It is here also that he must have converted the virgin saint, Thecla, whose name was so famous in the early Church, as having been the first martyr of her sex, as St. Stephen had been among men. Her "acts" are thought not to have escaped interpolation as they now exist, but this fact can have nothing whatever to do with her existence, and her fame was spread far and wide, and commemorated by many of the Fathers, long before the interpolations could have gained any authority. As our Lord had said that He came not to send peace, but a sword, upon earth, the preaching of the Gospel in Iconium created great division. "The multitude of the city was divided, and some of them held with the Jews, and some with the Apostles. And when there was an assault made by the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to use them contumeliously, and to stone them, they understanding it, fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the whole country round about, and were there preaching the Gospel."

Here also we may notice that St. Luke implies that a considerable space of time elapsed while the Apostles were thus occupied. Lystra was the scene of a great miracle wrought by St. Paul, which led to very remarkable consequences. "Now there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a

cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. The same heard and listened to Paul as he spoke, who looking upon him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand up right on thy feet! And he leaped up and walked." We are at once reminded of St. Peter's miracle at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, which was the first great display of miraculous power in the Apostles after the Day of Pentecost. The miracle at once attracted the attention of the people. "And when the multitude had seen what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice in the Lycaonian tongue, saying, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter, but Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. The priest also of Jupiter who was before the city," that is, his statue was erected before the gates, as that of their patron, "bringing oxen and garlands before the gate," as it seems, of the house where the Apostles resided, "would have offered sacrifice with the people." It would seem that the Apostles went home after the miracle, and did not understand its effect on the people, who had cried out in the Lycaonian tongue. Thus the preparations for the sacrifice were already made when they became aware of what was passing. "Which when the Apostles Barnabas and Paul had heard, rending their clothes, they leaped out among the people, crying out and saying, Ye men, why do ye these things? We also are mortals, men like unto you, preaching unto you to be converted from these vain things to the living God, Who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are therein, Who in times

past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, He left not Himself without testimony, doing good from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And speaking these things, they scarce restrained the people from sacrificing to them."

It is hardly rash to ascribe the substance of this speech to St. Paul, as it seems to breathe his mind. It may be given us by St. Luke in this narrative as companion to the other speech at Antioch, addressed to an entirely different audience, and we also see in it many thoughts which were afterwards developed more fully, when the Apostle spoke to the Areopagus, especially the idea of the goodness of God in His daily Providence being a witness to the truths of natural religion concerning Him. The exaggerated exaltation of St. Paul and St. Barnabas in the eye of the people was very short-lived. "Now there came certain Jews from Antioch and from Iconium, and having persuaded the multitude, stoned Paul and drew him out of the city, thinking him to be dead. But as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and entered into the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the Gospel in that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and to Iconium, and to Antioch," in Pisidia, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them priests in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in Whom they believed. And passing

through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia. And having spoken the Word of the Lord in Perge, they came down to Attalia," a seaport lying to the west, "and thence they sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been delivered to the grace of God, unto the work which they had accomplished. And when they were come, and had assembled the Church, they related what great things God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."[1]

It may be well to notice here a geographical fact which may serve to explain what seems at first sight to require explanation, namely, why the Apostles did not proceed beyond the limits of the provinces which have been mentioned in the narrative of their labours. We have already said that it is quite possible that St. Peter, after fixing his see at Antioch, some years previous to the first expedition of St. Paul, may have preached in the provinces which are mentioned in the opening verse of his First Epistle. If St. Peter preached there, it is almost certain that he would have preached at that time to the Jews only, as he had not as yet opened the doors of the Church to the Gentiles. Moreover, St. Paul mentions, in his Epistle to the Romans,[2] that he did not build on another man's foundation, meaning that he was guided to evangelize those countries chiefly where as yet no Apostle had preceded him. If we look at the map of Asia Minor, as it was at the time of which we are speaking, we find that the provinces which had been included in this first missionary circuit are almost hemmed in on every side by

[1] Acts xiii., xiv. [2] Romans xv.

others which seem to have been the scene of St. Peter's preaching. North of Pisidia lay Phrygia, a part of which was in the province of Asia, and another part in that of Galatia. North-east of Lycaonia lay the province of Cappadocia, adjoining that of Galatia. It is also remarkable, that although the part of Lycaonia in which was Iconium, the most northern of the cities visited by St. Paul, was afterwards included in the province of Galatia, yet at that time it was a separate tetrarchy, under a quasi-independent prince, Amyntas. To reach either Pontus or Bithynia, the Apostles must have passed through the province either of Asia or of Cappadocia. Thus the limit of the preaching of the Apostles in this expedition was already clearly laid down.

Other reasons may no doubt have operated to bring about their return to Antioch. But it will be observed that St. Luke speaks of them as if they had accomplished the work for which they had been sent. They must have been absent from Antioch for a considerable time, apparently not less than two years. The expedition on which they had been engaged was not an ordinary work. It was the first enterprise of the kind in the Church, the first flight, so to say, of the Apostle to whom the whole heathen world had been committed. It had its own remarkable features, acceptance by the Gentiles, fierce opposition by the Jews, wonderful miracles, severe afflictions—in one case St. Paul had been stoned, and was thought to be dead—and, above all, marvellous success in the conversion of others than the Jews. The Churches had not been simply founded,

but organized, and priests ordained to administer them. These were things which it was well to communicate to the Church from which they had set out, even if St. Paul had no forecastings in his mind as to the imminence of the serious question concerning the Mosaic law, on the solution of which his triumphs among the heathen were to throw so much light.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.

SEVERAL most important steps had now been taken towards the execution of the great design of God for the admission of the Gentiles to the Church, which was connected, as St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans, with the rejection of the Jews, who were no longer to be the chosen people.[1] The conversion of St. Paul was one such step, followed by his preparation for his work in a manner altogether unique, unless we compare with it the preparation of St. John Baptist. The reception of Cornelius and his friends at Cæsarea by St. Peter had been another such step, and this had been followed by the action of other Apostolical preachers of less authority at Antioch and elsewhere. The missionary journey of which mention was made in the last chapter was another such step, and added all the weight of Divinely secured success to the arguments in favour of the free admission of the Gentiles. But another step was still to be taken, this time not by St. Peter alone, but by the Apostles and ancients assembled at Jerusalem in Council. And after this, the question was to be fought out a long time, during almost the whole remaining lifetime of St. Paul, but

[1] Rom. xi. 28.

fought out in detail, in one Church or place after another, for there could no longer be any doubt as to the decisions of the supreme authority.

The question was naturally raised by the objectors to the action of St. Peter and St. Paul. Unless objection was made, the principle of the free admission of the Gentiles, and the abrogation in their favour of the obligations of the Law, would be firmly established in practice. St. Luke relates the facts with his usual simplicity and conciseness. He tells us that St. Paul and St. Barnabas remained some time at Antioch after their return. "And some coming down from Judæa, taught the brethren, that except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved."[2] The teaching did not, as reported by St. Luke, go further. Nothing was openly said at Antioch about the keeping of the Law, but the obligation of the Law was urged at Jerusalem by some of the Pharisees who believed, and St. Peter's speech implies that that was in question.

"And when Paul and Barnabas had no small contest with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of the other side, should go up to the Apostles and priests to Jerusalem about this question. They therefore being brought on their way by the Church, passed through Phœnice and Samaria, relating the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received by the Apostles and ancients, declaring how great things God had done with them."[3] The common joy, however, was disturbed

[2] Acts xv. 1. [3] Acts xv. 2—4.

by the objections from among the converted Pharisees already mentioned. They declared that the Gentiles must be circumcised, and made to observe the Law. The Council which was assembled in consequence may have been composed of the Apostles who were at Jerusalem at the time, one of whom, St. James, was the Bishop of the city. St. Peter was there, and St. John, as we learn from the Epistle to the Galatians. No others are named, and perhaps no others were present, but as to this we cannot be certain.

Here again St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, adds several points of which St. Luke makes no mention. He tells us, for instance, that he went up "by revelation." All through the historical part of the Epistle to the Galatians he puts the special personal guidance of God over him forward, for obvious reasons. Nor is there any more difficulty in thinking that he had a particular revelation on the subject, while at the same time the journey of himself and St. Barnabas was determined on by the Church at Antioch, than there is in thinking that when he was sent away from Jerusalem by the faithful, after his first visit as a convert, he had also a special revelation from our Lord that so it was to be. Indeed, such is a common way in which God deals with His servants. They have a preternatural intimation of His will, and then the step He intends is brought about by some authority. He also tells us that he went up partly for the purpose of making himself sure of the approval of the Chief Apostles as to the line which he was taking in dealing with the heathen converts, and that this was done privately. "I went

up according to revelation, and communicated to them the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but apart to them that seemed to be something, lest perhaps I should run or had run in vain."

This must have been, in the eyes of St. Paul, the important matter. And he goes on to tell the Galatians how cordially St. Peter and the others received him. "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Gentile, was compelled to be circumcised. But because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—to whom we yielded not by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you. But of them who seemed to be something . . . for to me they that seemed to be something, added nothing," that is, they insisted on no change whatever in his manner of acting or teaching. "But contrariwise, when they had seen that to me was committed the Gospel of the uncircumcision," the preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, "as to Peter was that of the circumcision (for He Who wrought in Peter to the Apostleship of the circumcision, wrought in me also among the Gentiles), and when they had known the grace that was given to me, James, and Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision. Only that we should be mindful of the poor, which same thing also I was careful to do."[4]

Now that his brother had suffered martyrdom,

[4] Galat. ii. 1—10.

St. John must have stood alone by the side of St. Peter, and he had besides the distinction of being the inseparable companion of the Blessed Mother of God. St. James, the brother, that is, the cousin, of our Lord, was the Bishop of Jerusalem, and thus had a very great authority over the local Church. He was looked up to, in an especial manner, as the chief of the converted Jews, a careful observer of the Law himself, and held in high veneration by all the inhabitants of the city, whether Christians or not. Thus the method pursued by St. Paul and St. Barnabas in dealing with the heathen converts, had the highest possible sanction before the meeting of the Council. It has always been the method of the Church to attach the highest importance to the declarations of such assemblies, even when there has been already a Pontifical decision, inasmuch as all bishops have the office of testifying to the faith, and such testification has the further value that it influences the minds of the faithful very much, by showing that the ordinary pastors are in complete harmony with the highest official authority. But we need not be surprised if in the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul, who is engaged in establishing the divine origin of his own Apostolate, does not add, to the assent of St. Peter, St. John, and St. James, that of the Council, and makes no mention at all of its decrees. The older Apostles had no doubt been quoted against him to the Galatians, and his reference to them as "those who seemed to be something," is probably occasioned by the taunts levelled against himself as an Apostle who was inferior to them.

When the Council met, it seems that there was first of all a general discussion in which the chief Apostles took no part. Then, when there had been much disputing, Peter rising up said to them, "Men, brethren, you know that in former days," that is, at the time of the conversion of Cornelius, "God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, Who knoweth the heart, gave them testimony, giving to them the Holy Ghost as well as to us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Here again we have the principle for which St. Paul always contended, of justification by faith. St. Peter went on to express the truth most plainly and strongly. "Now, therefore, why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe to be saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in like manner as they also."[5]

This was a clear and most decided definition of the law from the mouth of the Chief Apostle. It was received with immediate and silent acquiescence by all. "And all the multitude held their peace." The next step was that St. Paul and St. Barnabas should give a public account of the miraculous evidences with which God had blessed their late preaching, which had been carried out on the principle which St. Peter had laid down. "And they gave ear to Barnabas and Paul telling what great wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Thus the doctrinal declaration of St.

5 Acts xv. 6—11.

Peter was confirmed by the evidence of miracles, just as God had, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, bestowed the Holy Ghost upon them marvellously even before their Baptism. After the evidence of miracles was to come the witness of prophecy. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, "Men brethren, hear me. Simon hath related how God first visited to take of the Gentiles a people to His Name," that is, under what circumstances and conditions He had brought about the conversion of the first Gentiles. "And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written: After these things I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will rebuild the ruin thereof, and I will set it up, that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all nations, upon whom My Name is invoked, saith the Lord Who doth these things. To the Lord was His own work known from the beginning of the world."[6]

St. James then went on, not to lay down the doctrine which was to guide the action of the Council, but to propose the practical measure to be taken. "Wherefore I judge that they who from the Gentiles are converted to God, are not to be disquieted. But that we write to them that they refrain themselves from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him in the synagogues, where he is read every Sabbath." The proposal therefore was to abide entirely by the truth as laid down by

6 Acts xv. 13—18; Amos ix. 11, 12.

St. Peter, and thus to settle the question which had been raised in the sense contended for by St. Paul. But St. James suggested a concession to the Judaizing party, not in itself onerous as going beyond the law which the Gentiles must have been ready to observe, except in two ceremonial points on which it was very important to insist, inasmuch as otherwise there might have been very little hope of amalgamating into one harmonious society the converts from Judaism and the converts from among the heathen.

The first thing named by St. James, the "pollutions of idols," seems to mean any participation whatever in idolatrous rites, such as met dwellers among the heathen almost daily. The houses and streets were full of idols, and almost all the meats sold in the market might be supposed to have been offered in the temples, while public and domestic life were full of occasions of idolatry. The reference seems to be more especially to the eating of meats either in the heathen temples, or when it was known that they had been offered there. Otherwise even the Jewish Rabbis did not insist upon any question being asked, although the Jews in general dealt only with Jewish butchers, on account of their rules about blood, and things strangled. The prohibition of fornication seems strange when found among these precepts, inasmuch as that sin is against the moral law. But it is clear that to the heathen mind, such was the degradation of manners, it was not plainly a sin at all, any more than it now is among a great number of heathen nations. The First Epistle to the Corinthians, not to mention other passages of St. Paul, is

enough to show us that in a place like Corinth the Christian converts might need very strong admonition as to the indulgence of the passion here spoken of. So powerful is this vice, that it is sometimes difficult even in Catholic populations to make people understand its malignity. The prohibition of "things strangled, and blood," refers to the precept of the Law, by which the blood, being the life, was not to be fed upon, whether as in the case of meats so killed as still to retain it in the veins, or as a separate article of food. The Mosaic prohibition was insisted on in the Apostles' time, as it is in our own, with great strictness by the Jews, and the decree of the Council before us was no doubt aimed at forbidding to the Gentiles what would certainly render their social intercourse with Jewish converts altogether impossible.

"Then it pleased the Apostles and ancients with the whole Church to choose men of their own company," that is, as it seems, out of the members of the Council themselves, "and to send them to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, Judas who was surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren, writing by their hands. The Apostles and ancients, brethren, to the brethren of the Gentiles who are in Antioch, and in Syria, and Cilicia, greeting. Forasmuch as we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, to whom we gave no commandment, it hath seemed good to us, being assembled together, to choose out men and send them to you, with our well-beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have given their lives for the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves also will by word of mouth tell you the same. For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay no further burthen upon you than these necessary things, that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from things strangled, and from fornication, from which things keeping yourselves, you shall do well. Fare ye well. So they being dismissed, went down to Antioch, and when they had gathered together the multitude, they delivered the Epistle, which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. But Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, comforted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after that they had spent some time there, they were let go with peace by the brethren to them that had sent them. But it seemed good to Silas to remain there, and Judas alone departed to Jerusalem." It may be observed that the language of the Epistle is not quite identical with the suggestion of St. James, as the Epistle only forbids the use of things offered in sacrifice to idols.

Thus the final authoritative step was taken as to the admission of the Gentiles to the Church, with no conditions imposed on them except such as required the observance of the moral law, abstinence from all partaking in meats offered to idols, and the observance of rules as to food which might secure peace, harmony, and loving intercourse with their Jewish brethren in the faith. The letter was addressed only to the converts at Antioch, and Syria and Cilicia, which was the scene of St. Paul's

earliest labours, and the ceremonial prescriptions became at no late date practically obsolete, either by the adoption of the Jewish customs by Christians in general, or by the cessation of the Jewish prejudices against what was forbidden. Henceforth St. Paul could no longer be in any way fettered as to his course among the Gentiles. The attacks made by the Judaizing party were never to cease, as far as we know, as long as he lived, but they could no longer be supported even by a semblance of authority. They had brought on him, as soon as they had taken definite form, the open and solemn approbation of the Church. The prescriptions of the Council, whether they were meant or not to be of universal and perpetual obligation, had left the Gentiles free on the negative side. No more could ever be imposed on them. And the questions that had been raised settled far more, by the declaration which they obtained, than the immediate issue. The declaration of St. Peter about faith and grace, involved the abrogation of the Law for Jews as well as the freedom of the Gentiles from it. Thus the annulling of the Law as such, which, as St. Paul says to the Galatians, was brought about by the Death of our Lord, Who took away the curse, that is, the penalty decreed against those who did not keep it, by being made a curse for us,[7] was quietly and almost silently carried out, by the instrumentality of those who were themselves so zealous for the Law.

Here then we may well pause, and indeed we have in these few chapters traversed more than half

7 Galat. iii. 13.

of the whole history of the Acts of the Apostles. We can see from what has been said how St. Luke has fastened on the most vitally important points of that history. It is not merely because he was the chosen companion and beloved friend of the great Apostle that the remainder of his book is devoted to the actions of St. Paul. The question as to the Gentiles had now been practically settled. Still, after this, the controversy was to last in one place after another, often with great bitterness, until within a few years the Temple itself was to be destroyed, the Priesthood lost, the whole nation to whom the Law had been given scattered over the face of the whole Empire. But the step of turning to the Gentiles had been now formally taken, and the transference of the covenanted mercies of God and hope of salvation from the Synagogue was accomplished in principle at the same time. All had been done, as God's works are done, swiftly, quietly, sweetly, so that many who lived at the time, and who profited by the accomplishment of this great counsel could hardly have been aware of the magnificence and far-reaching wideness of the counsel itself.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY AND THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

If the events of which we have been speaking, the conversion of St. Paul, the opening of the Church to the Gentiles by St. Peter, the preaching to them of St. Paul and St. Barnabas, and the Council of Jerusalem which declared their exemption from the Mosaic obligations, were acts of God's Providence so mighty and magnificent as we have supposed, it is natural to think that no created heart could have glowed with fervour and love and gratitude at their accomplishment in a degree more worthy of the goodness and wisdom and power of God than that of the Blessed Mother. We cannot doubt that she understood most fully, as far as a creature can understand the works of God, all the beauty of the plan of Providence, all the mighty graces which were poured forth in its execution, all the wisdom and power and love by which that execution was wrought out. In proportion to the supreme grandeur of God's revelation of Himself in this work, would be the intelligence thereof which would be imparted to her, as also her thanksgiving and praise of God and the increase of her love and joy.

It is often said that one reason for our Blessed Lady's presence on Mount Calvary was, that it

was becoming that so great an act of God and of our Lord should have some witness to it who could understand it, appreciate it, give thanks for it adequately, as far as it was possible for a creature to do so. So we may surely say that it was well that the life of our Blessed Lady in the Church on earth should be prolonged, until these other great acts of God were practically consummated, in order that her prayers and praises might rise to Heaven for this marvellous extension of the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Cross to the whole posterity of Adam.

We must not, however, forget the further truth, that our Blessed Lady had an office and a commission to discharge with regard to the Church, beyond the praises and prayers and thanksgivings which the series of God's great mercies naturally aroused in her heart. When we call her the Mother of the Church and of the people of God, we mean that she watched over the Apostles and their disciples with an intense maternal anxiety, and used all the resources of her knowledge of the ways of God and of the wiles of His and their enemies to avert danger and secure them the most perfect guidance and protection from Heaven. Those who are familiar with the contemplative writer to whom we have more than once referred, will remember how full her pages are of instances of this motherly protection, and of the many marvellous favours which the Apostles and the Church received from her intercession. Because we have confined ourselves, almost entirely, to the narrative of Sacred Scripture, it must not be supposed that it is in-

tended to question or deny what is to be found in the work alluded to, which constitutes a class of facts which might be naturally expected, when the great dignity, power, and charity of our Blessed Lady are taken into consideration, her interior zeal and love for the honour of our Lord, and of all who bear His Name. These things may seem strange to those who understand but very partially her position in the Kingdom of her Son, and His desire to give all boons through her. And it may be added, that we have ordinarily very imperfect notions of the greatness of any of the saints of God, their activity, energy, intelligence of the danger of souls, and their power to assist them. Few things will be subjects of greater surprise to us in the next world than the knowledge which will there dawn on us of our blindness in this respect.

It is hardly probable that our Blessed Lady had remained at Jerusalem during the whole space of time which we have lately been traversing, from the martyrdom of St. Stephen to the Council of Jerusalem. A very old tradition, which is assumed as true in the letter of the Council of Ephesus to the people of Constantinople after the condemnation of Nestorius, tells us that St. John visited that city and that our Blessed Lady accompanied him. There is no doubt at all that St. John was at Ephesus after his exile in Patmos, and spent there the last years of his life. But that date would be too late for the visit here spoken of, as our Blessed Lady was not alive, according to any account, much later than the time which we have now reached in our sketch of the history. And it seems likely that we should

have heard of the teaching of St. John at Ephesus, if it had been previous in time to St. Paul's ministry there. But, just as it seems probable that St. Peter may have preached to the Jews of the dispersion in many provinces of Asia Minor even before the conversion of St. Paul, so it is not improbable that St. John may have been at Ephesus at an earlier date than that of the Council of Jerusalem. After St. Peter's deliverance from prison, under Herod, who had already slain St. James the Great, it seems that it may have been very unsafe for so conspicuous an Apostle as St. John, the brother of James, to remain in Jerusalem, and he may have taken that opportunity to visit the country in which he was destined afterwards to labour. His visit need not have been long, and his presence there, in company with our Lady, may have left behind it the tradition of which we speak.

It is a disputed point whether our Blessed Lady died at Jerusalem or at Ephesus, although the balance of traditional evidence may point to Jerusalem. In any case, if St. John was present at the Council, it is not likely that she was elsewhere, and we may well imagine the joy which it would give her to hear St. Paul and St. Barnabas relate the blessings with which God had favoured them during their Apostolic enterprise. She must have seen both Apostles before, but the work which had now been accomplished would be more fully understood and appreciated by no one. And now that we are about to pause in our examination of the history as it remains to us, we may add a few words as to the special office of our Blessed Lady with regard to

these and other great works, as they were wrought out under the guidance of God by His beloved Apostles.

The presence of conspicuous saints in the Church has always been considered as an immense boon, not only on account of their example and the power of their prayers, which is so often proved by great miracles, but also on account of the influence with which they are often entrusted on the counsels of the official and supreme Rulers. This characteristic of the Saints is not universally manifest, but at certain times and in certain difficulties it becomes more prominent. St. Gregory VII. was the right hand of successive Popes, before he ascended himself the Pontifical throne, and St. Bernard was the great moving spirit of the Church in his day. Female saints, like St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Catharine of Siena, have also exercised this great influence. It would not therefore be at all out of keeping with what we know of the history of the Saints in the Church, if we were to adopt the opinion of many of the Fathers as to the kind of guidance exercised by our Blessed Lady over the counsels of the Apostles. The Holy Ghost, to Whom their guidance was in the first place committed, may have used the wise motherly advice of Mary as the organ of His inspirations, as our Lord said of Him that He breatheth where He will. In a great number of questions, as we may see hereafter, our Blessed Lady was a most perfect witness to them of the words, actions, intentions, and spirit of our Lord, and it must be remembered that the whole Catholic system had to be established in the few years of which we have been speaking.

In some parts of the Church a feast is kept in honour of "the Division of the Holy Apostles," by which is meant their separation, after the time of their residence at Jerusalem, to carry out the command of our Lord, "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The Evangelist tells us that they carried out the commandment and that the Lord confirmed their word by the miracles which He had promised, and St. Paul speaks more than once of the very wide diffusion of the Gospel teaching which had taken place within a few years of his own conversion. It is not easy to fix the exact time at which the Apostles finally separated, and it is highly probable that many of them left Jerusalem on expeditions more or less long, before the time came for them to part for ever in this world. The only argument against this is the silence of the Acts. This argument is of little weight, unless we are convinced that the author of the Acts had the office or the intention of writing a full history. This supposition is altogether untrue. We must always think of the Apostles as men burning with charity and zeal, and eager not to lose a moment to impart to the world the graces and light which God had entrusted to them. They were men who would not rest a day longer than was inevitable to go forth to preach to every nation.

They could not look forward to many decades of active work in any case, and under the conditions of their mission as sheep among wolves, and with the certainty of persecution and opposition of every sort before them, of which, as time went on, they had abundant experience, their anticipations as to the

length of time during which they might hope to labour cannot have been very sanguine. Yet they had the whole world before them, and the "charity of Christ," as St. Paul says, urging them on to spend themselves with the utmost lavishness of self-sacrifice in the cause of their Lord. St. Paul's Epistles may give us some insight into the burning zeal which consumed the whole Apostolic College. It is for this reason that we conclude with so much certainty that during the period of years which we have already passed in review, after the Day of Pentecost, the untold exertions of the Apostles must have very greatly exceeded any of which we have an account. The idea of the majority of the Twelve resting in Jerusalem, worshipping in the Temple, quietly observing the old Law as any other Jews of Palestine, with the addition of the practice of the Christian religion, and doing little or nothing of Evangelical work except among their own countrymen, is not a Catholic, and can hardly be called a Christian, idea. It is said that our Lord enjoined on them not to leave Palestine as their chief scene of labour for twelve years. There is at all events every reason for thinking that, if the tradition be correct, it was not understood as forbidding them many long excursions in the missionary field elsewhere. If St. James went to Spain, it must have been before the end of such a period. If St. Peter preached in the countries which are named in the opening of his first Epistle, it must have been before his imprisonment by Herod. When St. Paul, after his return from Arabia and Damascus, went up to see St. Peter, no other of the Apostles seem to have been

at Jerusalem except St. James, the Bishop of the city. But Jerusalem may have been, as we say, their head-quarters, where some of the Apostolic College were certain to be found, and where St. James was fixed, and the point of time at which what we speak of as the dispersion of the Apostles took place, must mark the time when that state of things ceased.

By that time St. Peter had fixed his seat at Rome, St. Paul was engaged in his great work among the Gentiles, St. John, as it seems, was leaving for Ephesus, and the rest of the Apostles were about to set out on the work of evangelizing distant countries, from which they would no longer return after short intervals to Jerusalem. The Church had outgrown, not simply her cradle, but the limits of any country less extensive than the world itself. We have nothing but traditions to guide us as to the particular countries in which the other Apostles preached. But it is impossible to think that these traditions are not, ordinarily, well founded, and they point to very wide fields of action indeed, as also to the fact of the final martyrdoms of all the Apostles. How was the Church all over the world to be governed and preserved, unless the Apostles had made arrangements and rules for this great end?

The perfect uniformity of faith, thought, doctrine, principles, methods of action, and the like matters, necessary for the preservation of the essential unity of the Church in all the countries of the world, may have been secured among the Apostles by some special supernatural gift. But it was in many respects the

natural result of the long time during which they had been sharers in the companionship first of our Lord, and then of one another, under the guidance of St. Peter, who was to them the centre of unity in all these matters in the place of our Lord. It is not reasonable to leave out the consideration, that this identity of faith, action, and method might have been greatly helped by the blessing which they possessed in the presence among them of the Mother of our Lord. Certainly the Apostles did not lose their personal characters, and individual habits of thought and action. Few things can have been more beautiful than their mutual independence by the side of their wonderful unity and uniformity. We see something of this, perhaps, in the lives of the saints, who are so marvellously alike and yet so wonderfully individual. St. Ignatius at Rome and St. Francis Xavier in India were identical in their methods with their subjects and with all they had to deal with, though there were then no rules drawn up to guide those at a distance, and though St. Francis had left Rome even before the Society was established by the Papal Bull. For unity of spirit among saints is the work of the Holy Ghost in their several hearts, not of external constitutions, however wise.

But the preaching of the Gospel, the government of the Church, the administration of the sacraments, and the like, were now no longer confined to the Apostles only, or to their own immediate disciples. All over the world each Christian community was a little unit in itself. It was governed by a bishop of its own, generally taken from the

new converts, often the first in the city or town to be converted. The missionaries again, who were sent to preach to new countries were frequently disciples of the Apostles, or again disciples of such disciples. Thus the practical working of the Church was in the hands of a great number of men, not all of whom had much experience when they came first to their holy office. And thus, just as in the formation of a new religious community among Catholics, it soon becomes a matter of necessity to have certain documents, rules, and constitutions to oblige all to that uniformity in all essential matters, without which any such society must soon fall to pieces, so there was a necessity in the Church for certain things which must be committed to writing, and set forth by authority, except in the cases when a short form of words which could be committed to memory was sufficient. To provide for needs such as these must be supposed to have been one of the duties of the Apostles before their separation, and the provision must have been a subject of the deepest interest and prayer to the Blessed Mother.

Some of these needs, indeed, must have been already provided for, very early indeed in the annals of the Church. Such must have been the forms of the Canon of the Mass, of the Sacraments, of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the like. These, however, need not have been committed to writing in all cases. Few things are more remarkable in the contrast which they present to modern ways and ideas, than the extreme care taken in the early centuries to keep such forms and documents from the danger of falling into the hands of persons out-

side, or hostile to, the Church. This is a sufficient reason for thinking that, even if we had far more abundant sources of information as to those centuries than what we actually possess, we should still find a great absence of documents of this kind. These things were committed to the memories of the priests and the people, as far as the laity had occasion to know them, and thus they were secured from betrayal to enemies. It is probable that there were very few books in those days among Christians except the Sacred Scriptures and a few more. But it must certainly have been necessary that these precious forms should be handed on in the Church without mutilation or corruption in any way. But the mention of the Sacred Scriptures naturally suggests a subject as to which we cannot doubt that our Blessed Lady must have had a very special office of immense importance, and it is of this that we have now to speak.

One of the earliest needs of the Church, even before she began to spread herself beyond the limits of the Holy Land, must naturally have been the preservation of records concerning the acts and words of our Lord. In any case, these must have been what the faithful would most desire to possess, even if we take into account no other motive for their desire than their intense love for their Divine Master. His words and actions, His manner, His very look, must have been indelibly imprinted on the minds and hearts of those who had known Him, and others must have been most eager to gain from them what could be communicated to such as had not been so blessed. It was not, however, simply

a loving curiosity and a tender clinging to beautiful memories which made it necessary for the Church to possess such documents. It was most natural that our Lord's Life should form the great storehouse of materials for Christian preaching and instruction, as the Law and the Prophets furnished the reading and the instruction in the synagogues. We cannot tell how soon it became a recognized practice at the meetings of Christians to read in the Mass, as is now the custom, something from the Epistles and something from the Gospels, and of course the formation of the New Testament Scriptures must have preceded the general adoption of such a practice. But it is most natural to suppose that from the very earliest times some anecdote of our Lord, some parable, or miracle, or portion of His discourses, must have been introduced, and that collections may soon have been made in which such materials were preserved.

It would therefore be most important that accuracy should be secured for any materials of this kind which might be used liturgically, and indeed, used at all as having any authority among the faithful. It may not have been the case, in the very early time of which we are now speaking, that there was danger of actual falsification and invention from heretics. But, short of that, there was the great and inevitable danger that our Lord's words and works might not be recorded with absolute truthfulness. It would also be necessary that some kind of arrangement should be made of materials which were in themselves authentic, inasmuch as such materials might have been originally collected with-

out any view at all to order, whether chronological or otherwise. Thus we come to the obvious conclusion, that one of the most essential needs to which the Apostles had to look before they were to meet again, at all events, frequently in this world, must have been the formation of an authentic record of what we call the Gospel.

We know that God is the author of all Scripture, and we cannot imagine that any part of the treasure which we possess under that name can have been the object of His Providential care in a higher degree than the four Gospels. We know also that He could, if it had so pleased Him, have inspired one who had never seen or heard of our Lord to compose a perfect Gospel, which might have been dictated to him from Heaven word by word. St. Paul certainly speaks as if he had received his Gospel direct from Heaven, and he may mean by the word Gospel his treasury of knowledge of the minute details of the Life of our Lord, as well as the substance of His teaching on the mysteries of which that Life was made up.[1] But when we turn to the Gospels themselves, we find every reason for believing that God did not act in this way. There are but few incidents in the Gospels, few sayings of our Lord or events connected with Him, which might not be part of the natural human knowledge of the writers or of those from whom they may have learnt. The very form and method of the Gospels indicate that this knowledge, deepened, enlightened,

1 St. Paul has preserved for us one saying of our Lord which is not recorded in the Gospels; "It is more blessed to give rather than to receive" (Acts xx. 35).

secured from error and inaccuracy of every kind by the Holy Ghost, is the fountain from which their contents are derived. This is a matter so plain that it does not require insisting upon at any length And the conclusion to which this fact leads us is that the contents of these inestimable treasures have been furnished, as St. Luke says in his Preface, by those who from the beginning were "eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word."

It is one of the greatest delights of the devout students of these Gospels to trace out in the work of each Evangelist his own personal experiences, his individual character, or the points in our Lord's manner or His mode of dealing with the work before Him, which had an especial attraction for the disciple who afterwards came to be His historian. But we do not always remember that when the earlier Gospels were composed, or at least the Gospel of St. Matthew, there was living in Jerusalem, in the most intimate and constant communication with the Apostolic Body, as yet not separated, the one eye-witness and minister of the Word, who had known the history of the Incarnation from its very beginning in the Incarnation itself, who had been our Lord's inseparable companion from His Conception to the day of His Ascension, who knew Him, understood Him, loved Him, and treasured up all His actions and words with a fulness and perfection which no one else could share, and who had moreover a special characteristic gift of contemplation as to all that related to Him, "keeping all these things, and pondering them in her heart." Her authority was

unquestionable, her knowledge unlimited, her zeal for all that would benefit the Church knew no bounds, and her prudence and wisdom were equal to her love for our Lord. How is it possible to think that she must not have been constantly consulted by the Apostles, and by some at least of the Evangelists, not only on points relating to the government of the Church, but in a particular manner as to the details of those sayings and doings of her Son which were to form the Church's chiefest treasure throughout all ages?

It would take nothing short of a separate treatise to draw out what may be supposed to have been the influence of Mary in the formation of the Four Gospels. But we may be able to close this volume with a few remarks, which may perhaps suggest further thoughts to the devout student. The Gospel of St. Matthew is ordinarily considered as the first of the written Gospels. It is not necessary to think that there were no collections of the kind before its composition. Nor is it at all necessary to consider it as the most elementary and rudimentary of the Gospels. The comparative brevity, the more simply chronological order, of the Gospel of St. Mark, may well seem to give it this claim. But St. Mark's Gospel is clearly founded on that of St. Matthew, rather than that on it. It is an abridged form of St. Matthew's work, in which the arrangement according to subject matter is set aside for an arrangement according to the sequence of time, and in which certain elements which were more suited for the readers of St. Matthew and less for those of St. Mark are naturally omitted. The in-

ternal evidence gathered from a careful study of St. Matthew's book leads us to the conclusion that it was meant more than any other Gospel, as a text book for the Christian preachers and teachers in the very earliest years of the Church.[2] It is full of matter out of which instruction is to be drawn, especially the words, discourses, parables of our Lord, and in this respect it contrasts strongly with the Gospel of St. Mark, which is full of His miracles. It has also a continuous series of applications of prophecy to our Lord, such as would be most useful for those who had to deal with communities in which the Jewish element was predominant. Generally these are omitted in St. Mark. And in one very important particular it differs from the other Evangelists, except St. Luke, that is, it dwells to some extent upon the earliest part of the history of the Incarnation, whereas St. Mark begins at once with the preaching of St. John Baptist, and St. John also, after speaking of our Lord's Eternal Generation, passes on to the witness of the Precursor.

We do not know how soon it came to be a matter of constant care with the Church to insist explicitly on the truth of the Conception of the Son of God in the Virginal womb of His Blessed Mother by the operation of the Holy Ghost. St. Joseph was providentially removed from the world before our Lord began to preach, but He allowed Himself,

2 Tradition tells us that the body of St. Barnabas was found in Cyprus, where he was martyred, with a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel buried with him, which he had written out with his own hand.

as far as we know, to be considered, as St. Luke says, the Son of St. Joseph.[3] It seems impossible to suppose that there could ever have been any doubt in the minds of the Apostles and disciples in general, but it may have been a point as to which the world outside was allowed to think according to its own range of ideas. But as soon as a Gospel came to be written, this point would require to be settled beyond all doubt, as we find it settled in the first chapter of St. Matthew by the record of St. Joseph's hesitation and the vision accorded to him, while at the same time the famous text of Isaias is quoted about the promise renewed through him as to the Virginal Conception and Birth of the Messias. This, however, was a matter altogether removed from the personal experience of the Evangelist. It might, it is true, have been revealed to him directly from Heaven. But it is far more reasonable to suppose that we have here the first instance of direct reference to the supreme authority of the Blessed Mother herself.

The statement of the truth is made in a way which shows the utmost humility and modesty. We may also say that it is stated in a manner which shows her deep and tender love for St. Joseph, and for St. Joseph's honour. It is his witness, not her own—which was afterwards given—that is adduced, as it was his right to bear witness to the point in question. It is, as it appears, his genealogy that is

3 When the first disciples joined our Lord after His Baptism and Temptation, "Philip findeth Nathanael and saith to him, We have found Him of Whom Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus the Son of Joseph of Nazareth" (St. John i. 45).

given by this Evangelist. It is his action, all through, that is traced in these two short chapters, which contain all that St. Matthew gives us as to the Holy Infancy. He is, so to speak, the hero of this short narrative, from his "taking to him" his wife after he had received the Divine command, to his settling in Galilee instead of Judæa after the Flight into Egypt. It cannot be fanciful to see in all this the hand of his most loving Spouse.

There is another point as to St. Matthew's Gospel which is not always sufficiently remembered. If we are right in thinking that it was the earliest of all, and written before the general diffusion of the Gospel truths throughout the world by the preaching of the Apostles and their disciples, it may have received its present form even before the great questions as to the admission of the Gentiles to the Church had been authoritatively settled. But it contains continual reference to this admission, and it may be almost said that its internal evidence shows us that the truth on this point was one for which the Apostles were most anxious to prepare the faithful in general, and to furnish the Evangelical teachers with proofs that such was the decree of God. Thus we find St. Matthew inserting very soon in his chain of miracles the account of the healing of the servant of the Gentile centurion, as well as our Lord's commendation of the faith of the centurion himself, faith such as He had not found in Israel, and the prediction that many should come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham and the fathers in the Kingdom. The same truth is witnessed to in the miracle on the

Syrophœnician woman's daughter. But what is peculiar to St. Matthew, and can be traced to no one so probably as to our Blessed Lady, is the account which he gives of the Epiphany. It would have been easy to prove that our Lord's birth at Bethlehem was the fulfilment of a prophecy, by simply quoting the text of Micheas. But in this Gospel there is actually no direct account given of our Lord's Birth, and the Gentile kings are brought in as the first worshippers at the sacred crib, eliciting by their questions at Jerusalem the citation of the prophecy by the Chief Priests and Scribes themselves. When this Gospel was written, our Blessed Lady was the only witness of the Adoration of the Kings within reach, and we may take it for granted that this passage, like the rest of the first two chapters, comes from her.

We might dwell at length on other points in this Gospel which seems to indicate that our Blessed Lady had been consulted by its author, although she is seldom prominent in it. It is not impossible that her influence was exercised negatively, that is, in the exclusion from the narrative of certain things which must have lived in her memory, and also may have been within the knowledge of the disciples, such as the miracle at Cana and her own presence at the Crucifixion. The thing that is mentioned of her personally is the incident when, after she had tried to see our Lord, He spoke the words about the disciples being His "brother and sister and mother," an incident which she probably delighted in, as having furnished her with an opportunity of drawing from our Lord a declaration which, though it re-

flected no dishonour on her, at least showed His perfect independence of her, and thereby left a most useful lesson for Apostolical men under similar circumstances. And it is reasonable to infer, if we can trace her influence with tolerable certainty in these instances, that that influence was constantly operative throughout the Gospel when we cannot distinctly trace it. An Evangelist who had derived so much light from her, would not be likely to deprive himself of her guidance in his whole work.

St. Mark's Gospel, as has been said, is probably an adaptation of St. Matthew's work for the particular use of the converts at Rome to whom St. Peter preached. As they were in great part Gentiles, it would not be so necessary to convince them of the foundation of their privileges, as it was laid when our Lord was as yet a Child in arms, and besides, St. Matthew's Gospel shows very prominently in the two first chapters his intention of working out the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Person and Life of our Lord, an argument which was less fitted for the converts at Rome. St. Mark is not about to follow in the same line, and therefore, perhaps, he omits the account of the Infancy. One of the chief features of his Gospel is the occasional insertion of details which had impressed the watchful loving mind of St. Peter, under whose guidance St. Mark wrote. If his Gospel was composed at Rome, it would not have any traces of the personal influence of our Blessed Lady, except in so far as they were already to be found in St. Matthew.

We now come to the Gospel of St. Luke, which

of all others seems to show the greatest marks of our Blessed Lady's own authorship. Indeed, the whole of the two first chapters seem to come almost directly from her. It may be objected that this Gospel was not written until after the date usually assigned for her Assumption. It is certainly probable that it was written, either during the time when St. Luke was left for some years at Philippi, after St. Paul's departure thence in consequence of the persecution, or when St. Paul was in custody at Cæsarea, before his voyage to Rome. Internal evidence is rather in favour of the later date, inasmuch as it is very probable that St. Luke might occupy himself in enriching the collection he had already made by inquiries in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea and the rest of Judæa, properly so called, while his great teacher was in prison. And, as a matter of fact, he is the only Evangelist who gives any account of our Lord's preaching in that part of the Holy Land, as has already been said. But either of these dates would certainly be later in point of time than the decease of our Blessed Lady. But we must not forget that it is most probable, and indeed may be gathered from the preface to this Gospel, that its author may have been for many years collecting his materials, which he probably used continually in the discharge of his office as Evangelist, in explanation of our Lord's words and acts to the various Churches in which he ministered. Thus St. Paul's words about him, that his "praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches," may refer to his discharge of this duty in one place after another. This may have been done by him for

many years before his Gospel was written. In the course of these years it is evident that he must have been resident at some time near our Blessed Lady, and thus he may have learnt from herself, mediately if not immediately, the narrative of the vision of Zachary, the conception of St. John, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Purification, and of all that remains to us besides of the Infancy and Hidden Life.

It ought to surprise no one if it is added, that it may have been our Blessed Lady's own wish, providentially arranged by God, that these details, so honourable to her, should not be placed on record in a book until after she had passed to Heaven. We have seen how in the opening chapters of the first Gospels she, if our conjecture be true, has contrived to put her blessed spouse forward in all that relates to the Holy Infancy. In the Gospel of St. Luke the same events are treated historically, and certainly our Blessed Lady is the chief person in the narrative, after our Lord Himself, and our Lord Himself acts as it were through her. It was necessary for the enlightenment and delight of the Church in all ages, that these things should be recorded in the pages of inspiration, but this record may well have been delayed till after her decease, while at the same time the substance of the narrative, or even the very words, may come from her. To her, then, we may most truly owe those most precious details, which are at once the food of the soul to the simplest and humblest Christian and an inexhaustible treasure of doctrine to the theologian and the ascetic. There are little marks in

the narrative which serve to reveal the authorship, as when it is said that our Lord's "parents" went up every year to Jerusalem, and when our Lady's words are recorded, "Thy father and I have sought Thee." And it is in keeping with this that the genealogy given at the end of the third chapter seems to be her own genealogy, and not that of St. Joseph.

As St. Luke is the latest of the three historical Evangelists, it is very natural that he should devote himself as much as he does to mentioning what his predecessors had omitted, and supplying, as has often been said, incidents similar to what they had inserted, rather than repeating them. His familiarity with the whole Life of our Lord must have been very great to enable him to do this, and it may not be impossible that here also he derived assistance from the divinely guarded memory of our Blessed Lady. At the same time he omits a certain class of matter, which is found supplied by St. John. This head of matter consists almost entirely of the great discourses of our Lord, such as that to Nicodemus, the discourse after the miracle at the Probatic Pool, the discourse at Capharnaum after the miracle of the loaves, the disputations with the Priests of Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles and after it, and the long discourse after the Last Supper, followed by the prayer of our Lord to His Father before beginning His Passion. It has been said that as to all these precious documents, and the incidents connected with them, the two last Gospels dovetail the one into the other most perfectly. If we suppose St. Luke to have had access to our

Blessed Lady while collecting materials for his Gospel, it follows almost of necessity that he must have been in close connection with St. John, and this may perhaps account for what looks almost like an arrangement between them, that St. Luke should leave certain matters untouched which were to be put forward later by St. John.

It is in the last Gospel, written by the disciple whom our Lord loved, and to whom He commended His Mother from the Cross, that we find, not so much fresh details which no one but our Blessed Lady could have communicated, as, in the first place, the breathing of a spirit of closeness with our Lord all through which is characteristic of her, and in the second place, the two great mysteries, as they ought to be called, which especially reveal her power in the Kingdom of her Son, namely, the beginning of "signs" at her prayer at the marriage at Cana, and her presence by the side of the Cross while our Lord hung upon it till His Death. It is on the second of these especially that our Lady's great position as the Mother of the Church is founded. She had long passed away from earth when St. John wrote his Gospel, and he had then seen the Apocalyptic vision of the woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.[4] Mary is not mentioned in this Gospel except on these two occasions, the two mysteries which as it were connect the opening of the history with the end, while the sublime words and deeds with which the interval is filled up are just those connected with the great

4 Apoc. xii. 1.

sacramental truths on which her heart loved to dwell.

There is another subject, filling a very large space in each of the four Gospels, as to which it is quite certain that our Blessed Lady was the highest authority, and in the prominence of which in the narratives we may trace her guiding hand. This subject is, of course, the Passion. The only Apostle, besides St. Peter, who witnessed anything of what passed in the houses of Annas and Caiphas, must have been St. John. It is doubtful whether he witnessed what passed before Pilate and Herod, or the scourging and crowning with thorns, and all that followed. But it is certain that our Blessed Lady was more familiar with the details of the Passion than any one, that she either witnessed them herself or was aware of them by that special gift which enabled her to keep the Sacred Heart of our Lord company in all its sufferings, that she ever afterwards made them the continual subject of meditation and prayer, honouring each word and act and wound and insult of our Lord with a particular devotion, that in truth, the Passion was her constant and engrossing occupation, save that her remembrance of it did not prevent her from attending to the many calls which were made on her charity and her prudence. We may therefore assume that, although we may not be able to trace her influence and particular points, still our debt to her in the history of the Passion is enormous. And it may be added that it is likely that we owe to her faithful memory and habit of tender devotion the traditions concerning the Holy Places, the Way of

the Captivity, the Way of the Cross, and others, as well as the beginning of the veneration of the relics of the Passion.

In these and in a thousand other ways, the children of the Church of our Lord may see what is some part of their debt to His Blessed Mother, during the years when she was left on earth an exile from Heaven, for the sake of that Church which He loved so well. She was the first to practise that life of retirement and prayer for the needs of the world, which is the great earthly support of the Kingdom of God, and which is now carried on in hundreds of cloister homes, the inmates of which delight above all things in counting themselves as her children. She lighted up in the world's worst days the glorious beacon of the Virgin life, the rays of which illuminate the whole of Christendom, and which has raised marriage to a higher level than it could have attained, if it had not had by its side this witness of something higher and more heavenly. Her prayers and her counsels were of incalculable help to St. Peter, and the others of the Twelve, and they helped to bring to their side as a more fruitful labourer than any, the great Apostle of the Gentile world, the great trophy of the prayer of St. Stephen, who also was her beloved child. Her motherly heart took in the whole flock of the converted heathen, as she had sung in her *Magnificat* of the promises to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Wherever in the Old World or in the New there are children of the Church, there are the fruits of

the motherly prayers of Mary for the application of the merits of her Son. The centuries which were yet to be, while she remained on earth, were in her heart, as the generations yet unborn are in her heart now. She has had a share in securing to us, who live so long after her time, and many of whom have been born outside the pale of the Church, the blessings of the Apostolical teaching, and of the Catholic Unity, in which our souls have been kept or into which they have been guided. When we contemplate the Sacred Passion, when we read the words and actions of our Divine Lord, she has been before us in our devotion and our study, and the very words in which the incidents have come down to us may come almost immediately from her. She was the first devout worshipper of the Crucifix, the first loving and reverential communicant, the first to assist piously at the offering of the Adorable Sacrifice, the first Adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. And in that particular and special privilege which consists in bearing the cross of sorrow after our Lord, she kept Him company most faithfully while His life lasted, and, as we have seen, she had her own unique cross to bear for the sake of His children, which she took up with courage and self-renouncement so marvellous for the fifteen years about which our thoughts have been now engaged. May she win us the grace to know the gift which God has given us in her, and to use this inestimable treasure as He would have us use it!

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